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საქართველოს პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი
GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

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**National Endowment
for Democracy**
Supporting freedom around the world



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GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

The Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization founded in early 2011. GIP strives to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions and promote good governance and development through policy research and advocacy in Georgia. It also encourages public participation in civil society-building and developing democratic processes. Since December 2013 GIP is member of the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions.

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FOREWORD

Building a stable and sustainable democracy has been a key priority for Georgian governments since the country's first steps after independence. Together with domestic drivers of democratization, including political elites, civil society, and the general public, Georgia's democratization process has been strongly supported by external actors, particularly the European Union and the US. While Georgia is home to a relatively open and competitive political and electoral environment, the country's ability to consolidate its political institutions around a durable democratic culture is uncertain.¹

Despite the fact that Georgia, along with Moldova and Ukraine, signed an Association Agreement with the EU, and accepted the obligation to implement painful reforms, it has not yet been offered the same incentive proposed to the Western Balkan Countries. While deepening cooperation with the EU has been endorsed by the revised EU-Georgia Association Agenda 2017-2020² (November 21, 2017), which sets out ambitious reforms for enhanced political association and economic integration, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Brussels Summit declaration³ (November 24, 2017) failed to acknowledge a membership perspective for EaP associated countries. Even though the membership perspective is off the table, the Georgian government needs alternative options to maintain the chain of reforms that strengthen demo-

cratic institutions, as well as uphold Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic ambitions.

Against the background of high public approval for the Europeanization process, recent incidents in Georgia, including the illegal deportation of dissident Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Mukhtarli to Azerbaijan, have negatively impacted Georgia's Democracy Score (Declined from 4.61 to 4.68) in the Freedom House report.⁴ The Mukhtarli case, together with the arrest of Mustafa Emre Chabuk by Georgian police at the request of the Turkish government, exposes the external pressure put on the Georgian government from its immediate neighbors, which creates additional pressure on Georgia's democratization process.

In addition, even though the shift from semi-parliamentary rule to a parliamentary system of government was endorsed at a constitutional level, the shortcomings of the immature policy-making process are visible in the everyday practice of lawmaking in the country. The constitutional amendments proposed by the government were not supported by civil society organizations or oppositional political parties. Moreover, even though OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission's final report acknowledged the respect of fundamental freedoms during the 2017 Local Elections, it also emphasized ruling party's domination over the entire context of elections.⁵

¹ Cecire, M. Georgia's Long-Shot Democracy Not Quite Liberal. Foreign Affairs. October 20, 2016. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/georgia/2016-10-20/georgias-long-shot-democracy>

² EU and Georgia adopt revised Association Agenda, European External Action Service (EEAS) Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/35934/eu-and-georgia-adopt-revised-association-agenda_en

³ Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit Brussels, 24 November 2017 Available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31758/final-statement-st14821en17.pdf>

⁴ Freedom House Georgia-Nations in Transit, Country Report 2018, Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/georgia>

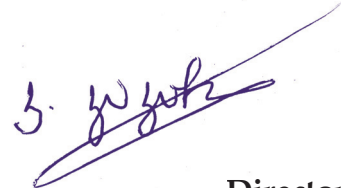
⁵ OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, Local Elections 2017, Available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/373600?download=true>

After analyzing Georgia's democratization process, one could conclude that external actors have been quite successful in leveraging Georgia's political reforms by applying political conditionality. However, external pressure is not enough to consolidate Georgia's democratic structures. This leaves domestic drivers with the main responsibility to play the initial role in reshaping the democratization narrative in the country. In this environment, a crucial question – Can democratization in Georgia continue without external conditionality? – must be asked.

This publication has been developed under the project - "Incentivizing Democratic Development", supported by the National Endowment for Democracy and implemented by the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP),

which strives to strengthen democratic institutions and promote good governance by encouraging public participation in political discourse shaping process. Consisting of four policy briefs, the publication introduces policy recommendations on major aspects of Georgia's Europeanization and democratization agenda, particularly on the influence of Western political conditionality on domestic agendas; the importance of democratic consolidation at the political level; and influences from non-western regional actors (Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Russia) on Georgia's democratization. Intended to encourage public participation in the democratic processes, this compendium creates the groundwork for government officials, field experts, civil society actors and interested stakeholders engaged in Georgia's gradual democratic advancement.

Dr. KORNELY KAKACHIA



**Director,
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**MAKING GEORGIA'S DEMOCRACY
WORK: WESTERN POLITICAL
CONDITIONALITY AND DOMESTIC
AGENDAS OF GEORGIAN POLITICAL
PARTIES**

BIDZINA LEBANIDZE¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

External democracy promotion has not brought any tangible results to most countries in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), contrary to Western expectations. Georgia has been one of the few exceptions to that trend, however.² The Black Sea country has advanced in terms of good and democratic governance over the last ten years and, even though the democratization process in Georgia remains unfinished, the country has experienced a number of democratic breakthroughs and, overall, democratic quality has increased. This policy brief

explores how democratic conditionality – a key instrument of democracy promotion that has been frequently applied by the US and the EU (defined in the policy brief as the “West”) – has been shaping the process of democratization in Georgia; analyses the trends over the last ten years; and offers recommendations to democracy-promoting actors on how to further improve their conditionality-based strategies in Georgia – and to Georgian ruling and opposition parties on how to deal with external democratizing pressure.

INTRODUCTION

The prospect of integrating with Euro-Atlantic institutional structures as a result of successful political and economic reforms – or what academics and policy practitioners call democratic conditionality – has long been among the West’s strongest tools for projecting influence and incentivizing liberal reforms. In the late 1990s, democratic conditionality helped Central and Eastern European countries consolidate their democracies and implement market-economy reforms, which resulted in their EU and NATO membership. Similarly, Western Balkan countries have recently been conducting democratic reforms to qualify for EU membership.

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, on the other hand, do not have an immediate EU membership perspective and NATO

membership is also becoming more distant as time passes, which means that Western democratic conditionality in these countries lacks the most attractive incentives. The EU tried to replace them by other incentives, such as the prospect of association agreements, free trade deals, visa-free movement and increased financial support (“more for more”). Hence, although based on less attractive offers, the neighborhood conditionality has become a key instrument to leverage political and economic reforms in the former Soviet Union member states. Yet conditionality-based democracy promotion by the West has so far failed to generate tangible results in the majority of the EaP states. In Belarus the incumbent regime remains unshaken despite Western pressure and in Armenia and Azerbaijan, the West has never managed to consistently apply political

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² For more information, see: Freedom House, “Nations in Transit 2017. Table of Country Scores,” accessed December 1, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nit-2017-table-country-scores>; Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis,” accessed January 19, 2018, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_FITW_Report_2018_Final_SinglePage.pdf

conditionality. On the other hand, Georgia, together with Ukraine and Moldova, represents a case of mixed success of EU and US political conditionality. Beginning in the late 1990s, Western conditionality has been an inextricable part of Georgia's democratic reforms and Western pressure has, on a few occasions, managed to fundamentally alter the strategies and objectives of ruling parties in Georgia: the Rose Revolution, the 2012 electoral power transition – and the political processes in its aftermath – have been heavily influenced by the political conditionality applied by the West. The lack of a membership “golden carrot” was substituted by Georgia's asymmetric dependency on the West and the reliance of Georgia's ruling parties on Western political and economic support, which made them vulnerable to Western pressure.

Yet, as evidence shows, Western conditionality cannot induce democratic transformation in third countries on its own, although it is a significant mechanism for stabilizing domestic democratic drive in transitional countries like Georgia. Its strength is in its power

to provide decisive support to pro-reform domestic players, such as civil society actors and opposition parties, which can limit the influence of reform-resistant groups, especially incumbent regimes and ruling parties that fear losing their grip on power. Without Western conditionality, (even if unfinished) democratic breakthroughs such as the electorates' protests against the attempts by the ruling regimes to falsify the elections and the 2012 electoral power transition would have been much harder to achieve. Yet, this conditionality has not always worked flawlessly in Georgia and, what is more, in some cases of democratic backslide, it was not invoked at all. The differential application of conditionality by the West can be attributed to several factors. In the case of Georgia, this may include the weakness of the opposition, the danger of instability and the tension between state-building and democratization. The remainder of this brief compares different examples of successful and unsuccessful cases of Western conditionality in Georgia and draws conclusions about when the West invokes conditionality and how it helps Georgia's democracy.³

SUCCESSFUL CASES OF WESTERN DEMOCRATIC CONDITIONALITY IN GEORGIA

Containing Shevardnadze's autocratic government

Over the last twenty years, there have been at least three landmark cases when the West successfully invoked democratic condition-

ality against different governments of Georgia: the 2003 electoral revolution, the 2012 electoral power transition and – most re-

³ It should be noted that democratic conditionality has been a significant instrument but it is just one of the tools on the West's democracy promotion agenda in Georgia. It has always been accompanied by instruments of financial support, capacity building, political dialogue and various persuasion mechanisms. Various Western non- and semi-governmental organizations (such as German and US political foundations, developmental institutions and numerous NGOs) have been investing enormous financial and advocacy resources in political education, the development of parties' programs and structures, improving the democratic quality of legislation and establishment of principles of transparency and democratic accountability at all levels of governance. Hence, conditionality has often worked efficiently in Georgia because it was supplemented by a whole range of other democracy-promotion instruments.

cently – the Rustavi 2 case. In all three cases, Western interference was crucial to tip the scales in favor of the democratic development of the country and to keep the ruling parties' power-hungry instincts in check. Yet Western conditionality also differed from case to case and the set of incentives at its core has also evolved over time. In the run-up to and during the Rose Revolution, the EU and the US mostly used political and financial pressure against the embattled regime of Eduard Shevardnadze. Western donors reduced financial support to Georgia and did not recognize the results of the 2003 parliamentary elections, bolstering the legitimacy of street protests that finally succeeded in ousting Shevardnadze's regime. By using political conditionality against Shevardnadze's government, the West was reacting to the process of Georgia turning into a typical failed state in the final years of Shevardnadze's presidency, which was marked by permanent economic crisis and dysfunctional state institutions.

A second important factor behind Western conditionality during the 2003 events was the growing divide between the incumbent regime and the broad public, which did not accept the political status quo. The presence of a formidable opposition made the change possible. The street protests in 2003 were led by politicians from the so called reformist camp within Shevardnadze's government who, together with civil society leaders, were considered in the West as a real alternative to the government, and were seen as leaders who would be able to curb corruption and incentivize much needed reforms in Georgia. Hence, the key factors that forced the West to side with the opposition and invoke strong conditionality against Shevardnadze's government were: the presence of a strong reform-minded opposition; the prospect of Georgia degrading into a failed state under corrupt and irresponsive regime; and the lack of societal support for the ruling party.

The 2012 electoral power transition

Another successful case of Western conditionality in Georgia was the 2012 electoral power transition. Unlike the immediate aftermath of the Rose Revolution, when the new Georgian government under Mikhail Saakashvili enjoyed unconditional support from the West, during the 2012 parliamentary elections three different factors forced the EU and the US to once again apply strong pressure on Georgian government. First, the impression was strong in the West that the reform agenda of the ruling United National Movement (UNM) party was running out of steam and the continuing rule of Saakashvili's party would result in the stagnation of reforms. Second, the UNM was becoming

increasingly unpopular domestically and the multibillionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili had gathered together the formidable opposition bloc the "Georgian Dream" (GD), which was seen in the West as capable of replacing the West's one-time favorite - the UNM. But more importantly, as in the case of the electoral revolution that ousted Eduard Shevardnadze from power, the growing alienation of the ruling regime from society was perhaps a ticking point that forced the West to roll back its support to the UNM. Third, the West was not comfortable with the idea of its protégé, then Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, replicating the "Putin Model" of changing the constitution and be-

coming prime minister after the two presidential terms. To oppose this scenario, both the EU and the US increased democratizing pressure on the UNM government and tried to ensure open and fair 2012 parliamentary elections by urging the government to participate in a peaceful transition of power.⁴ Both the US and the EU made future cooperation conditional on holding democratic elections.⁵ Western pressure was strengthened by the united opposition and the ris-

ing protest sentiments against the UNM rule in the electorate. The UNM had no choice but to accept its defeat in the parliamentary elections and hand power over to the GD. Hence, as it had during the Rose Revolution, Western pressure combined with the domestic protest and strong opposition to prevent a possible authoritarian backlash. This ensured another democratic milestone – in the form of the electoral power transition – on Georgia’s rocky road of democratization.

The Rustavi 2 case and the “restoration of justice” policy

During the GD government, the West has continued its conditionality-based approach. However, due to the improved quality of the election processes – and a weakened opposition, which allowed the ruling party to conduct democratic elections without risking its stay in power – the main focus of Western pressure has moved from election monitoring to other areas, such as the editorial independence of mass media and the political persecution of former officials. Western attempts to protect members of the former government represent a key feature of Western conditionality aimed at establishing the democratic rules of the game between the ruling party and the opposition. A certain

level of guarantee that the ruling party will not be punished after moving into the opposition, and that the new government will not use the resources at its disposal to weaken the opposition, is a key precondition to break the zero-sum-game mindset among politicians and establish a regular and stable power transition mechanism.⁶ Hence it is not surprising that the West has always vouched for the political forces in Georgia once they have been forced out from Government; the West insisted on guaranteeing security and basic rights for Eduard Shevardnadze after he stepped down as a president in 2003. But this sort of conditionality reached its highpoint after the 2012 elector-

⁴ Tanja A. Börzel and Bidzina Lebanidze, ““The transformative power of Europe” beyond enlargement: the EU’s performance in promoting democracy in its neighbourhood,” *East European Politics* 33, no. 1 (2017), doi:10.1080/21599165.2017.1280473

⁵ Two messages were the most crucial in this regard. During Saakashvili’s visit in Washington in 2012 US president Barack Obama openly urged the Georgian president in an unprecedented clear language to ensure “the formal transfer of power” through “fair and free elections”. Similarly, just a few days before the elections, the EU made “the quality and intensity of the relations with the EU in the future” conditional on democratic conduct of elections. For more information, see: Liz Sherwood-Randall, “President Obama Meets with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili,” The White House, accessed July 18, 2016, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2012/02/03/president-obama-meets-georgian-president-mikheil-saakashvili>; Catherine Ashton and Štefan Füle, “Joint Statement by High Representative/ Vice-President Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle, on EU-Georgia Relations and the Upcoming Elections,” accessed October 20, 2015, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-640_en.htm?locale=en

⁶ Bidzina Lebanidze, “What makes authoritarian regimes sweat? Linkage, leverage and democratization in post-Soviet South Caucasus,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 14, no. 2 (2014), doi:10.1080/14683857.2014.905040, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2014.905040>

al power transition, when the West tried to defend the representatives of the former UNM government. Western pressure was further strengthened by the strategic policy of the former ruling party the UNM, which has strong political links in the West and has been using its close ties with Western political circles to apply pressure on the GD government.⁷ So it is natural that the Western community did not like the idea of the GD's "restoration of justice" directed against UNM officials, a process that has often been criticized by Western journalists and politicians as a "political vendetta" and selective justice.⁸ The West could not entirely prevent the "restoration of justice" policy by the GD government; however by continuing to criticize the policy, the West forced the GD to significantly limit its scope. The West has been more successful in challenging the GD's attempt to monopolize the media landscape. The wide-scale criticism of the attempt by

the Supreme Georgian court to change the ownership structure of the only remaining national, government-critical TV station, Rustavi 2, was accompanied by an unprecedented decision of the European Court of the Human Rights (ECHR), which suspended the decision of Georgian court indefinitely.⁹ The GD government complied and Rustavi 2 has so far survived as a government-critical television.¹⁰ In general, though the GD has not been more authoritarian than the UNM as a ruling party, at times its reaction to the application of political conditionality has been more radical than the UNM's responses were during similar situations under its government. This has often resulted in a war of words between Western politicians and the GD officials, due to the fact that the GD officials have been diplomatically less skillful at confronting Western pressure and have lacked advocate networks in the West.

UNSUCCESSFUL CASES OF WESTERN DEMOCRATIC CONDITIONALITY IN GEORGIA

There have been few cases in Georgia's recent history when the West refrained from invoking democratic conditionality despite apparent autocratic tendencies. The most obvious example of Western reluctance may be the immediate period after the Rose Revolution, when the West unconditionally supported the new government's economic and institutional reforms. Already in the

first year of its rule, the UNM consolidated its power through constitutional changes that weakened parliament and moved the country in the direction of superpresidentialism.¹¹ Critical media remained largely silent; effectiveness was prioritized over transparency and democratic accountability as the anti-corruption crusade took uglier forms. A few years later, again both the

⁷ The UNM has been especially successful in leveraging its ties with the European Peoples Party – a center-right group in the European Parliament, which often resulted in open verbal conflict between the EPP members and the Georgian government.

⁸ Civil Georgia, "GD Hits Back at 'Unfounded Concerns' over Saakashvili Prosecution," accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27560&search=>

⁹ RFE/RL, "Thousands Celebrate European Court Ruling In Favor Of Georgia's Rustavi 2 TV," accessed January 4, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-rustavi-tv-echr-ruling-celebrate/28363966.html>

¹⁰ Freedom House, "Nations in Transit 2018: Georgia,"

¹¹ Freedom House, "Nations in Transit 2005: Georgia," accessed January 21, 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2005/georgia>

EU and the US criticized the shortcomings of the controversial 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections,¹² but, at the same time, they acknowledged the results and called on “all political forces to respect the election results and to engage constructively to resume an inclusive political dialogue in order to build a broad consensus in the interest of the country”.¹³ The West’s unconditional support of the UNM in the years following the Rose Revolution can be explained by three factors. First, in the immediate aftermath of Rose Revolution, the main focus of the West was on state-building measures and the UNM government delivered some unexpected results in terms of good (although not necessarily democratic) governance by rebuilding the state institutions from the scratch. Second, the Western democracy promotion strategy also often faces a so called democratization-stability dilemma, which means that uncertain democratic openings may lead to destabilization in the short- or medium term.¹⁴ Translated in the Georgian context, it would mean that supporting the opposition at any cost may have compromised UNM’s state-building reform agenda.¹⁵ The third, and perhaps the most important factor, was the opposition itself. The author of this paper has personally witnessed the failed attempts to establish a strategic dialogue between the opposition

parties and the European politicians in the run-up to the 2008 presidential elections. With the exception of a few politicians, the opposition lacked the necessary communication skills and used radical language, which was unacceptable for European politicians who were rooting for a peaceful political solution. Hence, it is no surprise that the Western political community considered the 2008 opposition as radical, reform-resistant and not mature enough to rule the country and that opposition largely failed to secure Western backing in the significant electoral year. To sum up, it can be argued that the UNM’s reform drive and the weakness of the opposition insulated the UNM government from Western pressure during the early period of its rule. Overall, the nine-year rule of the UNM shows that the West does not always invoke political conditionality, especially when it may endanger the pace of reforms or bring to power radical opposition. On the other hand, being a pro-Western government and conducting efficient reforms, as it was the case with UNM, is also not a guarantee of indefinite Western support. Sooner or later the West will pressure its client government to democratize, as it did with the UNM in 2012. The UNM’s example showcases the complex nature of democratic conditionality, which is often weakened by conflicting objectives. Supporting both ef-

¹² Bidzina Lebanidze, “What makes authoritarian regimes sweat? Linkage, leverage and democratization in post-Soviet South Caucasus,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 14, no. 2 (2014), doi:10.1080/14683857.2014.905040, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2014.905040>

¹³ Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, “EU Presidency Statement on the Parliamentary Elections in Georgia, held on 21 May 2008 (21/05/2008),” accessed March 26, 2013, http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/press_corner/all_news/news/2008/20080522_01_en.htm

¹⁴ Annette Jünemann, ed., *Euro-Mediterranean relations after September 11: International, regional, and domestic dynamics* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10093984>

¹⁵ It is important to note that the stability-democratization dilemma is not the only important feature of Western conditionality. The domestic discourses of transitional countries and hybrid regimes are also often shaped by this controversy. Georgian society was also plagued for many years by the stability-democratization dichotomy. Eduard Shevardnadze often used the “stability-first” discourse to justify the absence of reforms and demonize the opposition. The UNM also often portrayed the opposition as Russia’s fifth column, which aimed at destabilizing the country.

fective and democratic governance does not always go together. Moreover, the presence of a radical opposition, similar to that of the 2008 National Council, which may pursue radical solutions and prevent the peaceful coexistence of the government and the opposition, may be another impediment for

the consistent application of conditionality.¹⁶ Finally, the West is most likely to apply conditionality when there is a demand in society for political change and when the ruling regime loses public legitimacy, as was the case in 2012.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude from the experience of Georgia, one could argue that the quantity and intensity of Western conditionality depends on three factors: the degree of dependency of the country on the West; the degree of the democraticness and effectiveness of the political system; and the readiness of society for change and strategies of the opposition parties (see table 1). In the case of Georgia, where the first factor is constant, the intensity of the Western conditionality has varied based on societal attitudes, opposition tactics and governments' management of democratic and good governance reforms. There have been a few cases when the West could have, but decided against, applying de-

mocratizing pressure on the Georgian government. Whenever the conditionality was invoked, however, it was at least partly successful. The past and present Georgian governments have been aware of their dependency on the West, which has limited their capacity to oppose Western pressure. Both the UNM and the GD have had to strike a difficult balance between the wider goal of democratizing the country and the narrow political goal of retaining their grip on power. Yet, every time the West has drawn red lines, both of them complied: the UNM lost critical elections and the GD abandoned its attempt to control Rustavi 2 and limited the extent of its restoration of justice policy.

¹⁶ It should be noted though that the West failed to fully prevent similar radical policies pursued by the GD after the 2012 power transfer.

Table 1: List of political events when ruling parties' violation of democratic norms created conditions for applications of political conditionality

Key political events	Would-be political agenda of the ruling party	Western conditionality	Main reasons for presence/absence of conditionality	Instruments of conditionality
The 2003 elections, corruption, bad governance	Falsify elections if necessary to remain in power	Present - Successful	Failed state; inefficient and undemocratic government	Withdrawal of financial support; Questioning legitimacy of elections
The 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections	Falsify elections if necessary to remain in power	Mostly absent	Focus on state-building reforms; radical opposition	Political dialogue
The 2012 parliamentary elections	Falsify elections if necessary to remain in power	Present - Successful	Prevention of replication of "Putin-model" in Georgia; alienation between UNM and broader public	Political dialogue; persuasion; Indirect political pressure
"Restoration of justice" policy	Imprisonment of former officials	Present - Partly successful	Prevention of autocratic backsliding; UNM's close ties with the West	Political and diplomatic pressure
Rustavi 2 case	Control of only remaining government-critical countrywide television	Present - Successful	Prevention of autocratic backsliding	Political and diplomatic pressure; ECHR

There are three lessons to be learnt from the success story of the West's application of political conditionality in Georgia – for opposition parties, ruling parties and the West itself respectively.

First, the ruling parties' undemocratic practices are the main trigger for Western political conditionality, yet the West has not always been very consistent and demanding. Hence, ruling parties can escape Western pressure by generally following the norms of democratic governance even if they resort to questionable practices now and again.

Second, the positive image of the opposition is an important precondition for the West to

apply pressure on the ruling elite. To avoid the mistakes made in 2007-2009, Georgia's opposition parties should not only focus on the domestic electorate but also be on good terms with Western partners.

Third, the Western political conditionality has so far been quite successful but that success is not guaranteed in the future. To make it more successful, the West needs to diversify the scope of its pressure and continue to provide incentives as a main basis of its condition-based policy. Further, it would be advisable to also apply pressure on opposition parties by encouraging them to play by democratic rules and to overcome their egoistic nature by joining forces during elections.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The mixed record of the successes and failures of Western political conditionality in Georgia allows for a number of concrete recommendations for the West on how to improve its conditionality – as well as for the

ruling and opposition parties in Georgia on how to respond to Western pressure more effectively. In concrete terms, these recommendations include:

For Governmental parties

- Do not to cross red lines in terms of democracy and good governance
- Have permanent political dialogue with opposition parties
- Maintain close personal ties with Western politicians, governments, journalists and epistemic communities
- Conduct state-building and effective governance reforms in transparent and democratic manner

For Opposition parties

- Maintain close personal ties with the Western politicians, governments, journalists and epistemic communities
- Exclude the unconstitutional forms of power transition from the political toolbox
- Develop political programs that not only identify the weaknesses of the government but also offer viable alternatives
- Commit to basic liberal-democratic norms

For the EU and the US

- Acknowledge the vulnerability of the Georgian government to Western pressure
- Further diversify the thematic scope of conditionality
- Apply conditionality not only on the government but also on opposition parties
- Offer new incentives to ensure continued strength of conditionality

**GOOD FENCES MAKE GOOD
NEIGHBORS: HOW GEORGIA CAN
RESIST AUTHORITARIAN PRESSURE**

JOSEPH LARSEN¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Georgia is at a crossroads regarding its democratic development and European Union (EU) integration. Despite being a poster child for democratization in the post-Soviet space, its progress in consolidating democratic institutions has stagnated since the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party won a constitutional supermajority in 2016. Untrammelled by parliamentary opposition and operating within a system of weak checks and balances, GD's parliamentary majority has made a number of moves that cast doubt on its commitment to further democratic consolidation. Making matters worse, Georgia is being pressured by two authoritarian neighbors – Azerbaijan and Turkey – to flout its human

rights obligations. This has occurred as the country is attempting to obtain a membership perspective with regards to integration with the EU. This paper addresses a crucial question: Can Georgia continue to functionally integrate with its authoritarian but economically powerful neighbors – namely Azerbaijan and Turkey – without jeopardizing its ambitions for full EU membership? If so, how can Georgia's government strike an adequate balance in this regard? This paper addresses the above questions in detail while providing specific policy recommendations for maintaining regional economic integration while continuing to democratize and politically integrate with the EU.

INTRODUCTION

Georgia is at a critical juncture regarding its democratic development. In 2012, the country achieved its first-ever democratic, unchallenged change of government when the Georgian Dream coalition (GD) defeated the United National Movement (UNM) in parliamentary elections. From 2012 to 2016, the country's democratic institutions appeared to gain strength, due in part to relative balance between the governing and opposition parties. Since late 2016, however, when GD won a constitutional supermajority, a number of developments have cast doubt on the ruling party's commitment to further

democratization. In 2017, GD's parliamentary majority approved a new constitution with no support from opposition lawmakers and despite protests from a number of influential non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The new constitution will replace direct election of the president with an electoral college starting in 2023, and from 2024 will institute a ban on electoral blocs.² Moreover, media pluralism has diminished and the country's State Security Service remains unaccountable to the public.³

Democratic stagnation has occurred against

¹ Joseph Larsen is an affiliated analyst with the Georgian Institute of Politics and a lecturer at Caucasus University in Tbilisi. He obtained his M.A. in International Relations from Central European University.

² On March 23, 2018, GD's parliamentary majority passed amendments to the 2017 constitution which included abolition of the "bonus rule." The bonus rule would have allocated leftover parliamentary mandates to the party winning the largest percentage of votes and was one of the most criticized provisions of the new constitution. The ban on electoral blocs, another controversial provision, was delayed until 2024. For more information, see "Constitutional Changes Passed on Final Reading", Civil Georgia, 24 March 2018, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30976>.

³ "Georgia", Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/georgia>.

the backdrop of an unfavorable regional environment.⁴ Neighboring states include overtly authoritarian regimes (Azerbaijan and Russia), a once-aspiring democracy descending into authoritarianism (Turkey), and a semi-authoritarian country consistently dominated by a single party (Armenia). Levitsky and Way identify geographical location as an important factor in a given state's democratic development, finding that "Georgia is a case of high leverage and low linkage. A small, weak, and regionally isolated state, Georgia was highly dependent on the West ... In terms of linkage, Georgia possessed weak economic, political, technocratic and communication ties to the West."⁵ Put simply, Georgia's lack of geographical continuity with the EU weakens the pull of Europe and makes it more vulnerable to pressure applied by its neighbors.

As Georgia works to strengthen its democratic institutions and integrate with the EU, it will get no help from its immediate neigh-

bors. In fact, these countries may attempt to undermine its development, as the presence of a democratic Georgia with a robust civil society and strong human rights protections is not in the interests of regional authoritarian leaders. This policy brief focuses on Georgia's bilateral relationships with Azerbaijan and Turkey, the two countries with which it enjoys the deepest and most important strategic ties – and which pose challenges to its democratic development and adherence to human rights norms. This policy brief addresses a crucial question: Can Georgia continue to functionally integrate with Azerbaijan and Turkey without jeopardizing its ambitions for EU membership? If so, how can Georgia's government strike an adequate balance in this regard? This paper addresses the above questions while providing specific policy recommendations for continuing regional economic integration while democratizing and politically integrating with the EU.

A TROUBLED NEIGHBORHOOD

In 2017, two major scandals cast doubt on the government's ability to resist pernicious influences from Azerbaijan and Turkey. The first case involved Mustafa Emre Chabuk, a Turkish school teacher arrested by Georgian police on May 24.⁶ The arrest allegedly came at the behest of Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim just days after Chabuk was accused of having ties to US-based cleric Fethullah Gülen. Chabuk was sentenced by

the Tbilisi City Court to pre-extradition detention the next day. In July, Georgia's Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees refused to grant Chabuk refugee status. According to a report by Amnesty International, Chabuk risks torture and other human rights violations at the hands of the Turkish authorities if extradited.⁷ In addition to protests by human rights groups

⁴ "Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis", Freedom House, http://civil.ge/files/files/2018/FH_FITW_Report_2018_Final_SinglePage.pdf.

⁵ Levitsky, S. & Way, L. (2010) *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁶ "Turkish Citizen Sent to Pre-Extradition Detention Over Alleged Links to Terrorist Organization", Civil Georgia, 25 May 2017, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30129>.

⁷ "Georgia: Teacher at Risk if Extradited to Turkey: Mustafa Çabuk", Amnesty International, 26 May 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur56/6372/2017/en/>.

such as Amnesty International, Transparency International, and the Georgian Young Lawyers Association,⁸ European Parliament member Rebecca Harms urged the Georgian authorities not to extradite Chabuk.⁹

The situation is still fluid. On February 19, Chabuk was released from pre-trial detention following a ruling by the Tbilisi City Court.¹⁰ Chabuk still faces criminal charges and his status will not be decided until the Tbilisi City Court makes its final ruling. However, Georgia's Ministry of Justice ultimately has competence over whether to extradite. The crime Chabuk is accused of, facilitating the purchase of a stake in Tbilisi's Demirel College by a US-based company linked to the Gülenist movement, is alleged to have occurred entirely on the territory of Georgia and involved no Turkish entities, meaning there is a sound basis for refusal. Moreover, the Turkish government has requested the extraditions of numerous persons from a multitude of countries. In many of these cases, the requests have been rejected for lack of evidence. The Chabuk case is not exceptional in this regard. Harms renewed calls not to extradite after meeting with Chabuk shortly before his release on bail:

“If extradited to Turkey, I think he will be immediately imprisoned and will

be deprived of a fair trial. People who are considered Gülen followers are deprived of a fair trial in Turkey. If Çhabuk is extradited, the rule of law and human rights will be violated ... Georgia, a country which is in the process of democratisation, should not harm its reputation by extraditing Çhabuk to Turkey.”¹¹

Moreover, Chabuk's detention is not an isolated incident. Rather, it is one of several signs of Georgia's growing political dependence on Turkey.¹² For instance, Georgia's government has closed a number of Turkish-run schools following requests from Turkish officials.¹³ The school closures—such as that of the Şahin Friendship School in Batumi, which was accused of “serious violations” of enrollment regulations—have been justified on procedural technicalities. However, in each case the schools in question were accused by the Turkish government of ties to the Gülenist movement prior to closing, feeding speculation that Georgia's Ministry of Education is acting at the behest of Turkish officials.

This puts Georgia in an awkward position. Turkey is its main trading partner and a major source of foreign direct investment; it has also historically backed Georgia's interests within NATO.¹⁴ Turkey thus holds dispro-

⁸ “Decision of the Ministry of Refugees in Cabuk's case is illegal, unfounded and politically motivated”, International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, 10 July 2017, <http://www.isfed.ge/main/1251/eng/>.

⁹ “The Government of Georgia should not return him to Turkey – European Parliament member speaks about extradition of Mustafa Emre Chabuk”, Rustavi2, 16 June 2017, <http://rustavi2.ge/en/news/80431>.

¹⁰ “Tbilisi City Court Releases Turkish Citizen on Bail”, Civil Georgia, 19 February 2018, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30882>.

¹¹ “German MEP says Georgia should not extradite Çhabuk”, OC Media, 15 February 2018, <http://oc-media.org/german-mep-says-georgia-should-not-extradite-cabuk/>.

¹² For more information, see: Mikhelidze, N., “Turkey's Policy in the Black Sea Region: Oscillating Between Pragmatism and Opportunism” in Toperich, S. & Ünver Noi, A. (eds) (2017) *Turkey & Transatlantic Relations*, Washington D.C.: Center for Transatlantic Relations, <http://transatlanticrelations.org/publication/turkey-transatlantic-relations/>.

¹³ Owen, E. (2017) “Georgia: Gülen School Loses Licenses”, EurasiaNet.org, 6 February,

¹⁴ <https://eurasianet.org/node/82261>.

portionate leverage in the bilateral relationship. However, by extraditing Chabuk amid protests by the human rights community and some EU politicians, Georgia would tarnish its hard-earned reputation as the regional frontrunner on human rights. Given there is little appetite in Brussels to offer additional benefits to Eastern Partnership

countries, including Georgia, the onus is on Georgia's government to make the case why it deserves deeper integration.¹⁵ Brussels is looking for reasons not to extend the membership perspective—therefore, Georgia's government must avoid providing justification.

The Mukhtarli Abduction

A second and even more troubling scandal broke on May 29 when Afgan Mukhtarli, an Azerbaijani dissident journalist who had been living Georgia since 2015, was reported missing by his wife, Leyla Mustafayeva.¹⁶ He was confirmed to be in a detention facility in Baku two days later. According to statements made by Mukhtarli's lawyer, Elchin Sadigov, the journalist was kidnapped near his home in Tbilisi by people he believed to be representatives of the Georgian State Security Service.¹⁷ According to Sadigov, the captors covered Mukhtarli's head and drove him across the border into Azerbaijan, despite the fact he was not in possession of a passport.

Georgia's Ministry of Interior opened an official investigation into the incident on May 31. On June 9, without releasing any information to the public, the State Security Service categorically denied any involvement in the kidnapping.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the

incident damaged Georgia's reputation within the EU. On June 15, the European Parliament passed a resolution urging the Georgian authorities to ensure a "prompt, thorough, transparent and effective investigation into Afgan Mukhtarli's forced disappearance in Georgia and illegal transfer to Azerbaijan."¹⁹ The resolution also called on the Georgian government "to bring the perpetrators to justice" and reminded of its obligations to protect political asylees under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Moreover, the incident has severely damaged Georgia's reputation among the Azerbaijani dissident community, for which the country had been viewed as a relative safe haven. Mustafayeva has accused the government of refusing to protect her and of purposely delaying the investigation.²⁰

The wider public has also expressed disappointment with the government. According to a June 2017 poll by the National Demo-

¹⁵ For more information about relations between Georgia and Turkey, see: Cecire, M. (2013) "Georgia-Turkey Relations in a Georgian Dream Era", *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, Vol. 48, <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CAD-48.pdf>.

¹⁶ Lebanidze, B. (2017) "Life Without EU Membership: The Case for a Multi-Speed EaP", *Georgian Institute of Politics*, 18 December, <http://gip.ge/life-without-eu-membership-case-multi-speed-eap/>.

¹⁷ "Azerbaijani Journalist Alleges Georgian Security Complicit in his Abduction", *Civil Georgia*, 31 May 2017, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30141>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ "Statement of the Security Service of Georgia", *State Security Service of Georgia*, 9 June 2017, <http://ssg.gov.ge/en/news/248/saxelmtsifo-usaftrxoebis-samsaxuris-gancxadeba>.

²⁰ "European Parliament Adopts Resolution on Mukhtarli Case", *Civil Georgia*, 15 June 2017, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30196>.

cratic Institute (NDI) and Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), 82% of Georgians with knowledge of the kidnapping said the government should take responsibility for the incident because of its human rights obligations.²¹ Another 56% said they expected the incident to damage Georgia's reputation as a regional leader in human rights protection.²² Only 14% said they believed the government did not bear responsibility.²³

Despite Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili admitting the kidnapping was a "very serious failure" on the part of the Georgian authorities, nearly one year after the investigation began, the public is still in the dark as to whom is responsible.²⁴ Prime Minister Kvirikashvili demoted Interior Minister Giorgi Mgebrishvili on November 13, although there is no indication the move was connected to the Mukhtarli kidnapping.²⁵ Prior to being demoted, Mgebrishvili sacked the heads of the country's border police and counter intelligence services, ostensibly for failure to prevent the kidnapping.²⁶

Nonetheless, confidence in the Ministry of Interior has eroded. On February 19, a group

of 35 civil society organizations and media outlets issued a joint appeal calling on Parliament to set up an investigative commission.²⁷ The appeal referenced "serious shortcomings" and "significantly reduced public trust" in the Ministry of Interior's internal investigation.²⁸ So far, GD's parliamentary majority has resisted calls for a parliamentary probe—calls which have also been made repeatedly by the European Georgia minority faction in parliament.

This is a major foreign policy failure for Georgia, as it demonstrates one of two things to its EU partners: either the elected government does not have control over the State Security Service; or (even worse) the government is willing to flout human rights norms when pressure is applied by one of its more powerful neighbors.²⁹ If indicative of a deeper problem, such a state of affairs obviously precludes further EU integration. In order to restore confidence both internally and externally, Georgia's government must hold those responsible to account while establishing an effective mechanism for preventing such abuses in the future.

²¹ Mustafayeva, L. (2017) "Afgan Mukhtarli: after the abduction", Open Democracy, 13 October, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/leyla-mustafayeva/afgan-mukhtarli-after-abduction>.

²² "Public Attitudes in Georgia, June 2017", Caucasus Research Resource Center, <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nj2017ge/AZJRPHR/>. According to the same poll, a full 72% of the population had knowledge of the incident, meaning a clear majority felt the Georgian government should take responsibility.

²³ "Public Attitudes in Georgia, June 2017", Caucasus Research Resource Center, <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nj2017ge/AZJRINF/>.

²⁴ "Public Attitudes in Georgia, June 2017", Caucasus Research Resource Center, <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nj2017ge/AZRJNRS/>.

²⁵ "Afgan Mukhtarli Sentenced to Six Years in Prison", Civil Georgia, 13 January 2018, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30793>.

²⁶ "PM Announces Structural, Staff Changes in Cabinet", Civil Georgia, 13 November 2017, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30623>.

²⁷ Krikorian, O. (2017) "The Curious Case of Afgan Mukhtarli", Stratfor Worldview, 19 November, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/curious-case-afgan-mukhtarli>.

²⁸ "CSOs, Media Outlets Call for Parliamentary Probe into Mukhtarli Case", Civil Georgia, 19 February 2018, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30881>.

²⁹ Ibid.

Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey Trilateral Group

The three countries discussed here are interdependent. However, Azerbaijan and Turkey are problematic partners for a number of reasons. In addition to having authoritarian political regimes, both states have drifted away from the EU—in the Turkish case, the relationship has become overtly antagonistic.³⁰ Azerbaijan's flagrant human rights abuses have also become problematic for the EU, although the country's centrality to the Southern Gas Corridor has shielded it from criticism to a certain degree.³¹

While the incidents involving Chabuk and Mukhtarli are deeply troubling, Georgia does not have the option of limiting ties with Azerbaijan and Turkey. These strategic relationships are indispensable to Georgia, especially in the economic sphere.³² Perhaps most importantly, Azerbaijan provides nearly all of Georgia's imported natural gas—a relationship which helps ease the geopolitical pressure applied by Russia. Azerbaijan's dominant position in this aspect of the bilateral relationship gives it strategic leverage. That leverage was clearly abused in the Mukhtarli incident.

Georgia's political dependency is highlighted by the growing importance of the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey trilateral group, a regional format launched in 2011 to promote economic cooperation. The group primarily functions as a mechanism for facilitating the flow of energy from Azerbaijan and Central Asia to Turkey, with Georgia acting as the geographic fulcrum.³³ The three countries jointly host the Tbilisi-Baku-Kars railway, Tbilisi-Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline, and the Tbilisi-Baku-Erzurum gas pipeline. There is also a security component, with the trilateral group holding annual defense ministerials since 2014. Somewhat ironically, the 2012 Trabzon Declaration—the document setting out the key principles and priorities of the trilateral group—specifically stipulates adherence to “the fundamental principles and norms of international law” as well the “political independence of states.”³⁴ Ironically, both respect for international human rights norms and for Georgia's sovereignty are enshrined in the trilateral group itself, although they are not adhered to in practice.

Regional integration presents a catch-22.

³⁰ Because the results of the investigation have not been released, it cannot be known for certain which government officials, if any, had knowledge of or were complicit in the kidnapping.

³¹ Sanchez R. (2017), “Erdogan calls on Turkish Families in Europe to have five children to protect against ‘injustices’”. The Telegraph, 17 March, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/17/erdogan-calls-turkish-families-have-five-children-bulwark-against/>.

³¹ “Southern Gas Corridor”, tap-ag.com, <https://www.tap-ag.com/the-pipeline/the-big-picture/southern-gas-corridor>.

³² “External Merchandise Trade in Georgia”, Geostat, 20 November 2017, http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/english/bop/FTrade_10_2017_ENG-with%20cover.pdf.

³³ Cecire, M. (2013) “Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan: Trilateralism and the Future of Black Sea Regional Geopolitics”, The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, 16 October, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12837-turkey-georgia-azerbaijan-trilateralism-and-the-future-of-black-sea-regional-geopolitics.html>.

³⁴ “Trabzon Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Turkey”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, 8 June 2012, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/trabzon-declaration-of-the-ministers-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-azerbaijan_-georgia-and-the-republic-of-turkey_-08-june-2012_-trabzon.en.mfa.

Georgia must deepen its ties with Azerbaijan and Turkey for reasons of international trade and energy security. Moreover, Georgia's involvement in China's Belt and Road Initiative hinges on its status as a bridge between Europe and Asia; in the local context, that means a bridge between Azerbaijan

and Turkey.³⁵ However, overdependence on authoritarian neighbors can slow Georgia's democratic development and hamper its EU integration. Georgia must compartmentalize its economic and security relationships with Azerbaijan and Turkey from its political integration with the EU.

GEORGIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE EU

Georgia signed an Association Agreement (AA) with the European Union in 2014. While the bulk of the 752-page document concerns economic issues under the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), adherence to international human rights agreements is stipulated in Articles 1, 2, 4, 12, 13, and 15 of the AA.³⁶ In particular, Article 15 sets out Georgia's obligations to respect the rights and status of lawfully residing non-nationals. Accordingly, failure to protect Mukhtarli and other dissidents is not only a scandal, it's a violation of the country's obligations further to its EU integration.

Georgia also has specific obligations to the Council of Europe, the continent's leading human rights body. Georgia joined the organization in 1999 and accordingly has obligations to strengthen the rule of law and human rights protections, including the prevention of torture—all things put in question by the Chabuk and Mukhtarli cases. In November, the Council of Europe's co-rapporteurs for Georgia issued the following

statement regarding the Mukhtarli case:

"Georgia until now has rightfully had an excellent reputation as a safe haven for persons from other countries who fear prosecution for their beliefs and thoughts. Therefore the authorities should fully investigate these allegations and resolutely and promptly put a stop to any harassment of Azeri citizens in Georgia, irrespective of who the victims or perpetrators may be."³⁷

While it is unlikely the Chabuk and Mukhtarli cases per se will seriously impede Georgia's further EU integration, they could be symptoms of deeper problems: lack of oversight over the country's security services; lack of political will to resist pressure applied by more powerful neighbors; and lack of commitment to international obligations regarding democratization and human rights. Worst of all, Georgia's failure to prevent the Mukhtarli kidnapping and to resist calls for Chabuk's extradition could encourage further actions by Azerbaijan and

³⁵ For more information, see Larsen, J. (2017) "Georgia-China Relations: The Geopolitics of the Belt and Road", Georgian Institute of Politics, http://gip.ge/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Chineti%20Saqartvelo%20Eng_Ydit.pdf.

³⁶ "EU/Georgia Association Agreement", European External Action Service, 13 September 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia_en/9740/EU/Georgia%20Association%20Agreement.

³⁷ "Georgia: call for stronger system of checks and balances, including for security services", Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/tbilisi/-/georgia-call-for-stronger-system-of-checks-and-balances-including-for-security-services>.

Turkey. In order to continue to strengthen its democratic institutions and human rights protections in a manner conducive to EU in-

tegration, Georgia's government must take steps to strengthen its position vis-à-vis its neighbors.

CONCLUSION

Georgia is currently at a crossroads regarding its democratization and EU integration. While it has made democratic progress since 2012, the consolidation of its democratic institutions appears to have stalled. On the EU integration front, it has attained the main benefits offered through the Eastern Partnership—the DCFTA and visa-free travel. The logical next step would be the membership perspective. That is something enlargement-weary EU member states are hesitant to offer; thus, deeper integration will grow more difficult to achieve as Georgia moves farther along in the process.

Given that backsliding now carries higher costs, Georgia's government must redouble its efforts to further democratize and demon-

strate its successes to the EU. Unfortunately, those undertakings are not aided by its strategic relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey. For economic and security reasons, Georgia must continue to privilege its regional relationships, especially within the trilateral format. However, it must functionally integrate with its two neighbors in a way that doesn't impede its democratization or adherence to international human rights norms—i.e., it must compartmentalize its relationships with Azerbaijan and Turkey from its EU integration efforts. Moreover, Georgia's government must demonstrate to domestic constituencies that it will safeguard democratic and human rights norms within its own borders.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For Georgia's Government:

- Georgia's Ministry of Justice should strongly consider refusing to extradite Mustafa Emre Chabuk, citing both a lack of evidence against him and the country's human rights obligations vis-à-vis international norms and agreements signed with the EU. The Georgian authorities are under no obligation to extradite. Such a refusal could result in retaliation by Turkey, however. Georgia must thus cite its international obligations while appealing to the EU and US for diplomatic support.
- The Ministry of Interior should release the results of its investigation and disciplinary measures should be brought against those found culpable in Mukhtarli's abduction. At best, the Ministry of Interior failed to guarantee Mukhtarli's safety. At worst, members of the State Security Services acted in a criminal manner by participating in his abduction. Delaying the investigation only erodes public confidence in the Ministry of Interior and by extension Georgia's elected government.

- Georgia's government should strengthen oversight of the State Security Service, the lack of which has plagued the country for decades. In particular, it should ensure that a body wholly independent from the Ministry of Interior is given jurisdiction over investigations into alleged abuse. The government has already made an encouraging step in this regard by establishing the State Inspector's Service, an investigative body accountable to the Parliament.³⁸ The body must begin to operate before its effectiveness can be assessed, however.
- Georgia's government should embed itself as deeply as possible in EU structures. By making its EU integration functionally irreversible, Azerbaijan and Turkey will have less incentive to intervene in its domestic affairs. The Azerbaijani and Turkish authorities must be made to understand that Georgia's obligations undertaken under the Association Agreement and other relevant agreements are nonnegotiable.
- Georgia should make the case that Azerbaijani meddling in Georgia's domestic affairs is not beneficial to the bilateral relationship. Azerbaijan's actions—with or without the connivance of Georgia's State Security Service—have alienated Georgia's NGO community.³⁹ This limits the Georgian government's space to cooperate with Azerbaijan on issues crucial to the bilateral relationship, ultimately harming Azerbaijan's state interests.
- Georgia's government should be willing to utilize the leverage it has vis-à-vis Azerbaijan and Turkey. While both states are larger and economically more powerful, Georgia plays an important role linking Turkey to markets in the Caspian region and Central Asia, including transiting gas to Turkey, a major natural gas importer. Georgia is the fulcrum of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan gas pipeline, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum oil pipeline. Moreover, it is the regional hub for China's Belt and Road Initiative, in which all three states have stakes.

For the EU:

- The EU must walk a tight line. It should offer increased support and tangible incentives to Georgia in exchange for domestic reforms via the "more for more" principle. However, that should be done in a way that avoids the appearance of "rewarding" Georgia for the recent scandals. Recognition of the authoritarian pressure applied by Azerbaijan and Turkey should make support more forthcoming. However, that support should be conditional on swift and immediate reforms in Georgia.

³⁸ See: "Gov't launched State Inspector's Service to study alleged offences by law enforcers", Agenda.ge, 31 January 2018, <http://agenda.ge/news/94857/eng>.

³⁹ It is not possible to accurately assess the attitudes of the Georgian public at large due to the absence of relevant polling data. While polls conducted by NDI and CRRC demonstrate the majority of Georgians hold their own government responsible for the incident, attitudes toward the Azerbaijani government have not been changed.

- The EU should put pressure on Georgia's government to release the results of its investigation into the Mukhtarli case. This sends important messages to three audiences: to Georgia's government – that failure to oversee the State Security Services will not go unnoticed by the EU; to Georgia's society – that the EU remains an advocate for democratization and human rights in Georgia; and (most importantly) to the Azerbaijani government – that Georgia's human rights obligations are real and nonnegotiable.
- The EU should increase pressure on Azerbaijan regarding its human rights abuses and treatment of dissidents, including Mukhtarli. In particular, it should respond to Azerbaijan's attempts to harass Azerbaijani dissidents living outside the country, including in Georgia.
- The EU should attempt to broker an agreement between Georgia and Turkey regarding the Chabuk extradition question. In particular, that would mean pressuring Turkey to drop its claims against Chabuk. The Georgian government could offer something tangible in return, such as strengthening efforts to combat discrimination against the country's Muslim minority.

**DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN
GEORGIA: WHY DOES CONSENSUS
MATTER?**

LEVAN KAKHISHVILI¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The lack of democratic consolidation in Georgia has become an increasingly important challenge against the background of rising populism and democratic backsliding in Europe and North America. It is widely believed that the European Union's (EU) policy of conditionality has been the primary driver of Georgia's democratization and advancing its reform agenda. It is vital, however, that the uncertainty in the world today does not harm the process of democratic consolidation in the country, especially as it appears that the EU has already given Georgia the most significant short-term carrots. Consensus among the political elite and Georgian society on the significance of liberal democratic values and democracy for the development of the country is a major

factor in the continuation of domestic support for democratic reforms. Such consensus seems to be lacking in Georgia, however, and this dire situation needs to be urgently addressed by key stakeholders, such as political parties, civil society, the EU, etc. Consequently, the present paper addressing this problem, argues that the country's main political parties need to strengthen their commitment and emphasis on democratic values when speaking to the public and civil society should help political parties achieve this goal, as well as use their own channels to contribute to creating a consensus on democracy. The EU can also assist the process by increasing support for value change in the socio-political life of Georgia.

INTRODUCTION

The transition to democracy has not been a smooth and homogeneous process across post-communist countries. There is still an absence of democratic consolidation in some of these countries, where societies have experienced nearly three decades of fluctuations between democracy and autocracy. The consolidation of democratic achievements is more important today than ever before, however, due to the rise of right-wing populism, characterized by authoritarian tendencies, in Europe and North America. Such established democracies as the USA, UK, Netherlands, Austria, Germany and France have all experienced, to varied degrees, a surge in populism. Consequently, it should not be surprising if post-communist countries such as Poland and Hungary are

now experiencing democratic backsliding as a result of rising authoritarian tendencies. Georgia looks even more fragile against the rise of populism and authoritarianism in this context, due to the lack of the consolidation of democracy in the country. Therefore, before Georgia is hit by a strong wave of right-wing authoritarian populism, there is a need to create and consolidate a consensus on liberal democratic values, both in society and the country's political elite, in order to make the political system, as well as Georgian citizens, resilient to future threats.

A high degree of consensus among the political elite and the public about how the country should be governed and what the institutional framework should look like is

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necessary in order to strengthen political institutions. Therefore, in order to evaluate the process of democratic consolidation, it is necessary to examine the attitudes towards democracy in society as well as among political parties. The data, discussed below, suggests that there is a lack of public consensus about the importance of democratic governance. This puts the process of democratic consolidation in Georgia at risk because citizens who do not understand the value of democracy will easily tolerate authoritarian leadership. On the other hand, while political parties in Georgia recognize the importance of democracy, they do not pay sufficient attention to democratic values in their pre-election programmes. A political party that is not fully committed to democratic values can

easily adopt authoritarian tendencies once it obtains some degree of political power. This is especially likely when there is an absence of public consensus on the importance of democracy. Consequently, these two issues can easily threaten Georgia's democratic consolidation as the country moves along the path of democratic consolidation. This situation is further exacerbated by two external conditions: the absence of attractive carrots within the European Union's policy of conditionality² as well as the presence of authoritarian neighbours, which appear to be pressuring Tbilisi to submit to their will³. As a result, Georgia needs to look inward to build a consensus on the liberal democratic values and, consequently, adhere to the process of democratic consolidation.

METHODOLOGY

As argued above, values and attitudes become more important during the process of democratic consolidation. Therefore, public opinion and party positions need to be examined. For the purpose of evaluating how the public views democratic governance, survey data from the Caucasus Barometer, produced by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), have been used to analyze public attitudes and observe the trends that have emerged over the past decade.

The pre-election programmes of five Georgian political parties were analyzed using content analysis in order to understand the parties' positions and the degree of their commitment to democratic values. The analysis used five parties' 2016 parliamentary election party manifestos: Georgian Dream (GD); United National Movement (UNM); Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG); Labour Party (LP); and Democratic Movement - United Georgia (DMUG). Due to various limitations, other parties were not included in the analysis.

² See Lebanidze, B. 2018. "Making Georgia's democracy work: Western political conditionality and domestic agendas of Georgian political parties". [online] Available at: <http://gip.ge/making-georgias-democracy-work-western-political-conditionality-domestic-agendas-georgian-political-parties/>

³ See Larsen, J. 2018. "Good Fences Make Good Neighbors: How Georgia Can Resist Authoritarian Pressure". [online] Available at: <http://gip.ge/good-fences-make-good-neighbors-georgia-can-resist-authoritarian-pressure/>

CONSENSUS ON DEMOCRACY – INSIGHTS FROM THE PUBLIC AND THE POLITICAL ELITE

Attitudes and values are important during the process of democratization and, taking into consideration that Georgia is going through this process, public opinion should become more positive about democracy and related values. That has not proved to be the case, however: while the trend is not always

entirely conclusive, in some cases public opinion is clearly moving in the opposite direction. Furthermore, while political parties are adopting a discourse on democracy they do not always stress democratic values in their programmes.

Public ambivalence on democracy

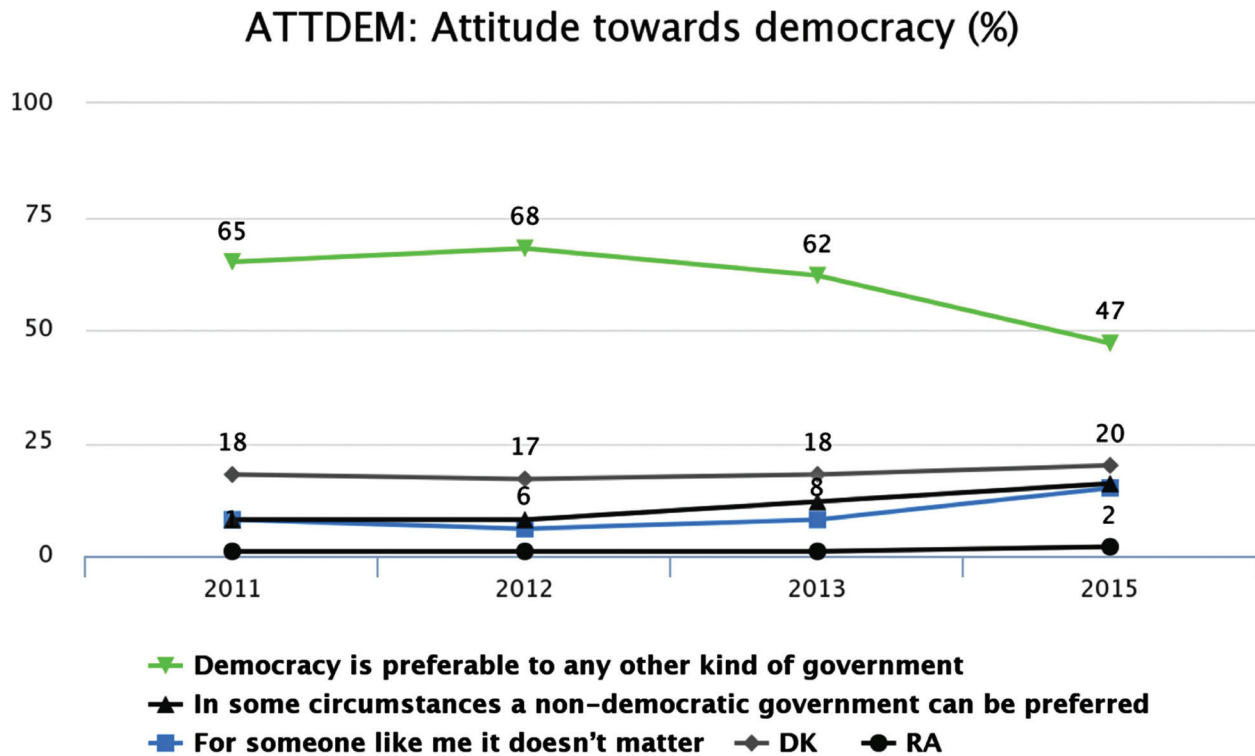
In the Caucasus Barometer survey⁴, respondents were asked which statement was closest to their personal beliefs: “Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government”; “In some circumstances a non-democratic government can be preferred”; or “For someone like me it doesn’t matter”. Although common sense would suggest that democracy should be increasingly preferable to any other form of government, the

data suggests the exact opposite (see figure 1). In 2015 more than half of the respondents did not think that democracy is the most preferable form of government, which is 21 percent lower than in 2012, when the level of support was at its peak.⁵ This downwards trend is alarming and suggests that the Georgian public has a predisposition for authoritarianism, which could be dangerous.

⁴ Caucasus Research Resources Center. 2011-2015. Time-series dataset Georgia. [online] Available at: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/>

⁵ Ibid.

Figure 1. Public attitudes towards democracy



Caucasus Barometer time-series dataset Georgia
Retrieved from <http://caucasusbarometer.org/>

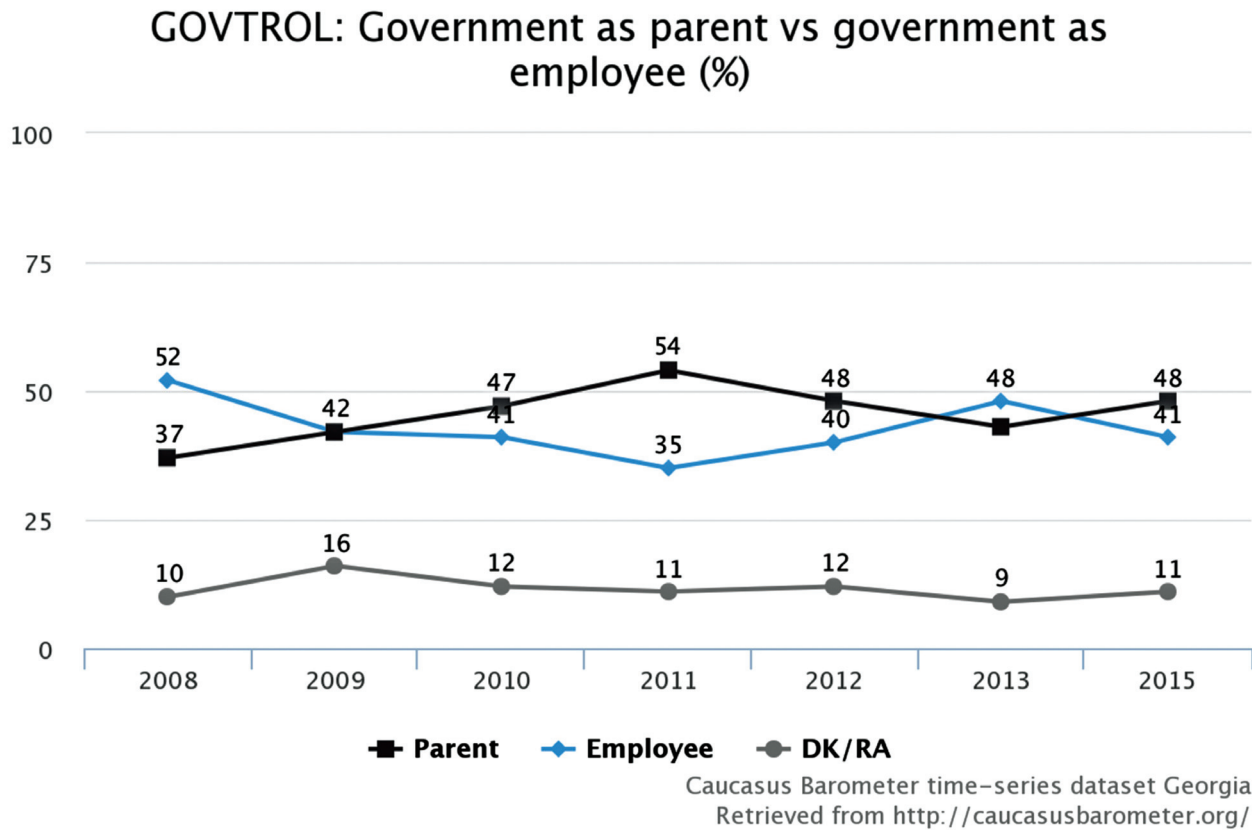
Data on how the Georgian public views the government and its role also suggest that popular values are not necessarily positively influenced by the process of democratization in Georgia. In 2015, 48 percent of the population agreed with the statement that “People are like children, the government should take care of them like a parent”, while 41 percent thought that the “Government is like an employee, the people should be the bosses who control the government”.⁶ Since

2008, these questions have been included in seven surveys and on only two occasions – in 2013 (48 percent) and in 2008 (52 percent) – did most respondents view the government primarily as an employee.⁷ This trend indicates that support for parent-like leadership is significant in Georgia which, like the previous trend, demonstrates that a large segment of Georgian citizens expresses an inclination for authoritarian leadership.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Figure 2. Public attitudes towards the role of government



Such an ambivalent attitude towards democracy could be explained by the possible lack of understanding of what democracy means. In 2014 and 2015 National Democratic Institute (NDI) measured how the Georgian public views democracy. In 2014 respondents were asked to name up to three things that they thought democracy meant⁸, while in 2015 respondents were given a list of seven features to evaluate a degree of their importance for Georgia's democratic development⁹. The results of the two surveys are drastically different. When respondents are presented specific features, they easily

deem them as important. However, when they have to name what features define democracy, there is much less consensus. For example, in 2015, 91 percent of respondents said that free and fair elections are very important (additional 6 percent said free and fair elections are somewhat important) for Georgia's democratic development.¹⁰ However, in the 2014 survey, only 8 percent of respondents mentioned free and fair elections as something that democracy means.¹¹ This is a dramatic difference indicating that the Georgian citizens may not be aware of what democracy means.

⁸ Exact formulation of the question: "What does democracy mean to you? Please, name up to three things."

⁹ Exact formulation of the question: "For each of the following, please tell me, how important or unimportant is it for Georgia's democratic development?"

¹⁰ Caucasus Research Resources Center. 2011-2015. NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, November 2015. [online] Available at: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/>

¹¹ Caucasus Research Resources Center. 2011-2015. NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, April 2014. [online] Available at: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/>

Table 1: Georgian public opinion and features of democracy¹²

#	Features	Percentage of respondents mentioning the feature among the list of three features attributed to the meaning of democracy (April 2014 survey)	Percentage of respondents perceiving the feature as important for Georgia's democratic development (November 2015 survey)
1	Freedom of speech	52	96
2	Equality before the law / Rule of law ¹³	39	96
3	Protection of human rights	33	97
4	Jobs	18	N.A. ¹⁴
5	Liberty	15	N.A.
6	Free and fair elections	8	97
7	Government responding to citizens' concerns	5	95
8	Ability to buy a variety of products	3	N.A.
9	Instability	1	N.A.
10	Curbing corruption	N.A. ¹⁵	95
11	Citizens' participation in public life	N.A.	95

Pre-election promises and democracy in political party programmes

The Figure 1 shows that almost one fifth of the population does not know what to think about democracy. This is a significant proportion of society and political parties need to work on increasing public awareness about the benefits of a democratic government. However, the second part of the problem is that parties do not stress democratic values sufficiently in their pre-election programmes. This means that there might not be a clear consensus on democracy among Georgian political parties or, at the very least, mixed signals about the democratic

form of governance are sent to voters.

The democratic values indicated in Georgian political parties' 2016 pre-election programmes can be classified into three categories (see Table 2). The first category covers issues related to human rights. The second category includes values related to the accountability of the government. The third and final category is related to promises about the political system and institutions. Two major patterns emerged as a result of the analysis. First, there is no apparent consensus among the parties about what con-

¹² Adapted by the author from Caucasus Research Resources Center. 2011-2015. NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, April 2014. [online] Available at: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/> and Caucasus Research Resources Center. 2011-2015. NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, November 2015. [online] Available at: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/>

¹³ In the 2014 survey respondents mentioned equality before the law or protection of justice but in the 2015 survey the list of possible responses included rule of law. The two features have been equated for the purposes of this research.

¹⁴ N.A. – the feature has not been listed for respondents' evaluation.

¹⁵ N.A. – the feature has not been mentioned by respondents.

stitutes democratic values. Second, large and small parties have different ideas about the meaning of a democratic government in Georgia.

Table 2. Democratic values in pre-election party programmes¹⁶

#	Pre-election promises	Political parties				
		GD	UNM	APG	LP	DMUG
1	Human rights					
1.1	Equality, civic integration, and social justice (women, children, minorities, people with disabilities)	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
1.2	Criminal justice / Restoration of justice	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
1.3	Rule of law, and law enforcement	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
1.4	Property rights	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
1.5	Freedom of speech, expression, and media	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
1.6	Freedom of assembly	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
1.7	Protection of personal data, and private life	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
1.8	Fighting trafficking	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
2	Accountability					
2.1	Political accountability	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
2.2	Financial accountability	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
2.3	Promoting responsiveness of public officials	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
2.4	Development of civil society	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
2.5	People's rule, power to people	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
2.6	Elimination of oligarchy	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
3	Political system and institutions					
3.1	Division of power, judiciary, and courts	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
3.2	Prosecutor's office	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
3.3	MIA and State Security Service	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
3.4	Public Defender	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
3.5	Local governance	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
3.6	Public service	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
3.7	Political system	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
3.8	Electoral system, and free and fair elections	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗

✓ - The promise is present in the pre-election programme of the respective party

✗ - The promise is absent in the pre-election programme of the respective party

¹⁶ The table is prepared on the basis of author's analysis of pre-election programmes of the indicated five parties. The programmes have been retrieved from the official websites of the respective party.

There are 22 different priorities related to democracy in the five pre-election programmes analyzed for this paper; 12 out of 22 are proposed by a single party. This means that more often than not parties do not share the same priorities. In addition, no single priority is mentioned by all programmes. Only one priority, equality, civic integration, and social justice (women, children, minorities, people with disabilities), comes close; it is mentioned by four out of five parties. Three parties promote the same two priorities, criminal justice or restoration of justice, and the division of power, judiciary, and courts.

Moreover, there is a division between larger and smaller parties. Although GD seems to be the only party that supports the majority of the priorities listed in the Table 1, it is worth noting that GD's programme is not concerned with issues related with accountability. Additionally, ensuring accountability does not appear to be a priority for the UNM, either. The priorities outlined by the APG and LP mostly focus on issues relat-

ed to accountability, however. This might be explained by the fact that larger parties, which have a chance to win an election, are not interested in accountability. Rather, they appear to desire unchecked power once in office. Consequently, it is possible to argue that these parties are not fully interested in democracy per se.

It has to be noted that the limitation of the content analysis of pre-election programmes is that it is designed to appeal to the voters and give them what they are interested in, which might not always be more democracy. However, party manifestos are still one of the primary sources of information for identifying party stances on various issues. Therefore, as a result of the discussion above, it can be argued that even though all Georgian political parties mention democracy (although APG only mentioned it once in the entire programme), a consensus among the parties on what democracy is and how it should work appears to be lacking. This puts the consolidation of Georgia's young democracy at risk.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE LACK OF CONSENSUS ON DEMOCRACY

As a result of the analysis of the public opinion polls and pre-election party programmes, it can be concluded that there is a lack of consensus on democracy and democratic values, not only in society but also among political parties. This is problematic and requires immediate action; if it is not addressed, Georgia could easily lose the democratic achievements that have not yet been consolidated. Almost half of the public is ready to follow, or at the very least not oppose, authoritarian leadership, which means that if the balance of bargaining pow-

er among political parties tilts significantly towards one actor, this actor might emerge as an authoritarian leader.

The constitutional reform process demonstrates why the lack of consensus is important¹⁷. It can be argued that a significant change, i.e. amendments to the political system and taking away the right of citizens to elect their president, has failed to secure broad public support. Consequently, it should not be surprising that some Georgians believe that it does not matter if the country is demo-

¹⁷ See Zurabashvili, T. 2017. "The end of direct presidential elections - the constitutional reform process in Georgia". [online] Available at: <http://gip.ge/6738/>

cratic or not (see Figure 1 above). The failure to secure a consensus was so apparent that it led some analysts to argue that “[t]he parliament, which led the entire reform process, failed to include all interested political parties and, importantly, to reassure the president ... that the amendments were not targeted at him personally.”¹⁸ Such a situation can only lead to one outcome – unstable institutions, which is the primary barrier for democratic consolidation. It is very likely that an unpopular constitution will be amended over and over again as political leaders are replaced, leading to instability and regime fluctuations based on personalities, not ideals. This high degree of volatility in the primary institution of the political system implies policy discontinuity – a situation where the trajectory of democratization becomes a roller coaster and the only permanent trend is change to the political system.

This leaves the question of what drives Georgia’s democratization. There are two likely answers: the high degree of uncertainty about the relative bargaining power among political actors and/or EU’s policy of conditionality. However, if Georgia wants to consolidate its democracy, it should not depend on a degree of uncertainty, which can be easily and unexpectedly altered, or on external pressure to democratize, especially after nearly all significant and foreseeable short-term carrots in the process of Europeanization have been exhausted. Therefore, Georgian political parties should develop a common vision of Georgian democracy and work closely with the public to promote democratic values among society. Such a consensus across parties and voters would create favourable conditions for the consolidation of Georgian democracy.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the public’s weak preference for democracy, Georgia needs democratizers in order to consolidate its achievements. Institutional actors, i.e. political parties that believe and are interested in making Georgian democracy work, would

contribute greatly to the development of the Georgian political system. To this end, Georgian political parties, the EU and international as well as local civil society organizations should follow the recommendations elaborated below.

For Georgian political parties

○ **Make democracy a clear priority and commit to democratic values** – according to the analysis of party pre-election programmes, it appears that Georgian political parties do not always articulate their commitment to democratic values. There is also a distinction between larger and smaller parties concerning the values stressed during elections. Therefore, it is important that there is agreement across the political

spectrum about why it is important for Georgia to consolidate its democratic achievements.

○ **Find internal drive to push forward democratic reforms** – during this uncertain transitional period of EU conditionality policy, it is important that Georgia identifies an internal driving force for its democratic consolidation. The reform agenda does not necessari-

¹⁸ Ibid.

ly require an external force to provide carrots to be implemented. Therefore, it is vital to continue democratic consolidation even without external conditionality.

- **Treat democracy as an issue that stands above political competition** – if an internal drive to push democratic reforms forward can be found, political parties in Georgia need to form a solid consensus on the significance of the democratic form of government.

This should stand above political competition as an issue of national interest.

- **Intensify promoting democratic values to the public to build wider consensus** – it is not only important for parties to form a consensus on democracy; it is necessary to actively work on building a wider consensus on democratic values in Georgian society. This is necessary to mitigate the possibility of Georgian voters succumbing to populist promises.

For the European Union

- **Create a new vision for Eastern Partnership countries to support democratic reforms** – after signing the Association Agreement and visa liberalization, Georgia is in limbo, which means that a new vision is needed to maintain support for democratic reforms. This implies the need for new “carrots” through the policy of conditionality, which will keep Georgia and its government attracted to the EU and

committed to the reforms agenda.

- **Intensify support of civil society organizations (CSOs) that promote democratic values** – Georgia needs assistance in implementing democratic reforms to improve public policies and services, so it is necessary to support civil society, which promotes democratic values among society and within the Georgian political spectrum.

For civil society organizations working in/on Georgia

- **Conduct public educational campaigns on what constitutes democracy and why it is important for Georgia** – in addition to the efforts of political actors, it also is important that CSOs intensify their activities to educate the public about democracy. The data shows that significant parts of Georgian society do not think that the form of government makes any notable difference in their lives. This public indifference towards political regimes needs to change.

- **Create an inter-party steering group to create a common vision of democratic consolidation** – CSOs have the potential to assist political parties in creating a common vision for Georgia’s democratic consolidation. Consequently, initiating the creation of an inter-party steering group that includes civil society representative can contribute to establishing and strengthening political consensus around democracy and democratic values. The declaration of this type of inter-party vision will also send a clear message to the voters that democracy is above political competition.

**CAUSING TROUBLE FOR
DEMOCRACIES: SHOULD GEORGIA
LOOK WEST TO LEARN RUSSIA'S
STRATEGY?**

IVANNA MACHITIDZE¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The combination of democratic promotion and democratic consolidation has long become a catch phrase for states to be recognized as high-achievers and their societies to be labelled as free. The West, the driving force of both processes, has underestimated the risk that the fruits of democracy promotion would be used for more nefarious goals than to aid its direct beneficiaries. However, the democratization process opens “windows of opportunity” for external actors to meddle via political parties and vibrant civil society, and find it relatively easy to breed agents that influence public opinion through country’s media freedom.

Alas, authoritarian powers have also been doing their homework, with Russia emerging as the most successful pupil. The Kremlin’s hard power rhetoric has been reinvigorated since the 2007 Munich Security Conference, in part by its strategy to protect ethnic Russians’ interests abroad as well as by its active promotion of Russian culture and history. Moscow has also influenced public discourse by demanding equal space for European and Russian values and the need to include Russia in international efforts to resolve complex issues, like Syria and terrorism.

Lacking its own normative power, the Kremlin has been actively promoting the weaknesses of Western democracies in an effort to stop its “Near Abroad” from following the democratization path. In addition to its successful use of soft power, Russia has been assertively developing strategies to breed popular distrust in democratic governments, fostering criticism for liberal values in Western societies. This process of discrediting democratic consolidation could have serious consequences for fragile democracies as democratic governance and the values associated with it risk losing their legitimacy.

This policy brief argues that Georgia should keep a close eye on Russia’s actions in the West to learn the Kremlin’s strategies to undermine democracy; known Russian tactics include exploiting popular dissatisfaction, deepening internal divisions and promoting civil society actors that are not necessarily pro-Russian but are illiberal and radical. Recommendations are also provided for domestic policymakers, as well as to international community with a view to effectively counteract possible Russian threats to Georgia’s democratic consolidation.

INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago, Peter Burnell, a prominent scholar on democratization, put forward a rather straightforward question: “Does democracy promotion work?”² Today, that question seems even timelier as, notwith-

standing massive investments in democracy promotion in former Communist bloc countries, illiberal democracy and democratic backsliding have been widespread, gradually undermining Western belief in the undis-

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² Peter Burnell (2007) “Does international democracy promotion work?”, Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, ISBN 978-3-88985-354-7, Accessed on 02.03.2018, Available at - <http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2011/3094/pdf/BurnellPromotionWork.pdf>

puted success of its assistance³.

For autocratic regimes, the new trend against democracy is welcoming. Lacking a set of attractive values to offer to democratizing societies, the powerful strategy of authoritarian states is to exploit the “windows of opportunity” in fragile as well as consolidated democracies. Russia has been doing its homework on the best practices and flaws of assisting democratic governance. Furthermore, it has achieved some success at copying technique of democracy promotion to fight against consolidated and consolidating democracies. Specifically, Russia is using soft power, a US-invented concept, to project its own influence through cultural rhetoric. It is replacing the West’s emphasis on democratic governance and the rule of

law with the prominence of order and stability: accountability to *all people* is replaced by the Kremlin with accountability to “*the majority that elected you*”⁴. In so doing, Russia is responding to the threat it perceives to its status quo and strategic interests in the region⁵.

This policy brief is organized in four parts: first, it provides an overview of the Kremlin’s tools to destabilize and divide democracies in the West; second, it addresses domestic and external dimensions of the environment in which Georgia’s democratization is taking place; third, it analyzes the grounds for Russia’s meddling; finally, policy recommendations are envisaged for Georgia to preserve its democratic achievements and resist Russian autocratic influence.

BORROWING FROM THE WEST, REACTING AGAINST THE WEST

A decade ago the Kremlin embarked on a strategy of projecting soft power and sharing its experience of building an orderly and stable state. In doing so, Russia co-opted the West’s network approach to democracy promotion by establishing its own “soft power agents” all over the world. The strategy is multi-fold, and pulls on a variety of resources both at home and abroad.

Since 2007 significant resources have been invested in the protection and enhancement

of the interests of ethnic Russians abroad. Russia’s soft power is being transmitted through the world-wide umbrella organization “*Ruskiy Mir*” and its affiliated agencies under the personal supervision of the Russian President Vladimir Putin. In addition, cooperation between Western political parties and their Russian counterparts have become a well-established practice resulting in support for Europe’s far-right and far-left political parties⁶. Finally, cyber-attacks has become a tool to influence the process and

³ Adding to the democratic fatigue, the year 2017 became a turning point when Hungary, a recognized pioneer in breaking the chains of Communism, pioneered again, becoming the first consolidated democracy downgraded to the semi-consolidated position. Poland is predicted to be another candidate to follow Hungary’s path.

⁴ CBSN (2018). Charlie Rose Interviews Vladimir Putin. [video], Accessed on 01.03.2018, Available at - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8k2pWbCjrw>

⁵ In the seminal paper of 2012 “Russia in the Changing World” Vladimir Putin stated: “I could have ignored the subject [plans to set up defense system in Europe], had not they been playing their games in the immediate proximity of Russia’s borders, undermining our security and upsetting global stability”.

⁶ How Putin meddles in Western democracies. (2018). The Economist. [online], Accessed on 07.03.2018, Available at - <https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21737276-and-why-wests-response-inadequate-how-putin-meddles-western-democracies?cid1=cust%2Fednew%2Fn%2Fbl%2Fn%2F20180222n%-2Fowned%2Fn%2Fn%2Fnwl%2Fn%2Fn%2FNA%2F100666%2Fn>

outcomes of national and local elections in Europe and the US⁷. This pattern indicates that the Georgian government, civil society and relevant international donors would benefit from keeping track of Russia's actions in the West. If consolidated democracies' domestic stability is already shaken through influencing public opinion, breeding popular distrust towards governing institutions, the fragile democracies of the former Soviet Union (FSU) are an easy prey for Russian interference.

In Georgia, it is necessary to study the domestic and external context in order to understand how Russia's strategy is playing out in the country. In the domestic context, in spite of its improving scores on democratic governance, Georgia's current government has been criticized for backsliding on its commitment to democratic ideals. For instance, the ruling party has used its constitutional majority in parliament to rush through major laws, like the constitutional reform⁸. In addition, despite overall praise for the 2016 parliamentary elections, numerous procedural violations were flagged⁹. Significant improvements are still necessary in several areas, including judicial reform and the notion of "restorative justice". Other

incidents have also raised red flags, including the abduction of exiled Azeri opposition journalist Afgan Mukhtarli from Tbilisi and his reappearance in Azerbaijan and attempts to meddle with media freedom (the attempt to take over the prominent opposition Rustavi 2 TV Channel). Unless the government fully addresses these concerns, it may find itself on the crossroads between responding to criticism and increasing popular trust or losing popular trust, and following the "Hungary-Poland scenario"¹⁰ by sliding into illiberal democracy.

In the external dimension, Georgia is striving to balance its deepening cooperation with the EU and membership aspirations with its pragmatic approach towards Russia under the framework of "normalization dialogue". Nevertheless, the Kremlin has not demonstrated a similar willingness to ensure that relations improve; it continues its policy of the recognition of the independence of both breakaway territories of Georgia and strategy of borderization¹¹. By attempting to normalize relations with Russia, the Georgian government has put itself in a difficult situation as it should seek a balance between the sometimes conflicted nature of its European aspirations, the dialogue with Russia and

⁷ USA TODAY. (2017). Russia engineered election hacks and meddling in Europe. [online], Accessed on 01.03.2018, Available at - <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/01/09/russia-engineered-election-hacks-europe/96216556/>.

⁸ Freedom House - Nations in Transit (2017). Georgia. [online], Accessed on 25.02.2018, Available at - <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/georgia>

⁹ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2017) OSCE/ODIHR final report on Georgia's parliamentary elections recommends thorough review of legislation, including removing loopholes for misuse of state resources. [online], Accessed on 15.03.2018, Available at - <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/297546>

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch (2017) Georgia/Azerbaijan: Journalist Kidnapped Across Border. [online], Accessed on 18.03.2018., Available at - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/05/31/georgia/azerbaijan-journalist-kidnapped-across-border>; Human Rights Watch (2017) Georgia: Media Freedom at Risk Possible Government Interference with Judiciary, Media. [online], Accessed on 18.03.2018, Available at - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/07/georgia-media-freedom-risk>

¹¹ Kakachia, K., Kakhishvili, L., Larsen, J. and Grigalashvili, M. (2017). Mitigating Russia's Borderization of Georgia: A Strategy to Contain and Engage. [online] Tbilisi: Georgian Institute of Politics, Accessed on 09.03.2018, Available at - <http://gip.ge/mitigating-russias-borderization-georgia-strategy-contain-engage/>

domestic public opinion. Secondly, Russia's hybrid warfare¹² in Eastern Ukraine may indirectly contribute to increasing its leverage over Georgia, raising fears at home of further threats to Georgia's own territorial integrity. Finally, Russia holds considerable economic leverage over Georgia: it is the country's second largest trade partner after Turkey¹³ as well as its fourth largest source of tourists¹⁴.

While it is important to understand the significance of Russia's leverages and linkages with Georgia, it is equally important to recognize the role Tbilisi plays in the process. While Russia sees Georgia's pro-Western orientation as a violation of its interests in the Near Abroad¹⁵, Georgia's "gatekeeper elites", namely, the government, determines the degree to which Russia's external influence is allowed.

WHAT MAKES GEORGIAN DEMOCRACY VULNERABLE TO RUSSIAN MEDDLING

"windows of opportunity" for direct and indirect influence

The pattern of Russia influencing democratic processes in Georgia indicates it is using similar techniques to those it employs in consolidated Western democracies. Georgia's internal peculiarities are crucial for understanding the grounds for Russia's effective influence, however.

Priority of socio-economic issues for the Georgian population. According to the annual Caucasus Barometer data, socio-economic issues are a high priority for Georgians¹⁶. Furthermore, when asked about the benefits that respondents expect from the EU Association, the top expectation was

Georgian products sold on the European market (82%), improved healthcare (80%) and improved security (76%)¹⁷. In Georgia, the contribution of the West and EU towards the success of democratic consolidation is crucial; therefore, Russia is using a strategy of discrediting the path towards the EU in the Near Abroad, especially in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. In this context, exploiting the idea that deeper cooperation with the EU does not increase living standards in the short- or medium-term might cultivate popular disappointment and push potential voters toward actors espousing anti-Western rhetoric based on socio-economic

¹² The term hybrid warfare refers to the blending of diplomacy, politics, media, cyberspace, and military force to destabilize and undermine an opponent's government (as in Foreign Policy.com article "Inside a European Center to Combat Russia's Hybrid Warfare" (January, 2018) by Reid Standish, Accessed on 30.03.2018, Available at - <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/01/18/inside-a-european-center-to-combat-russias-hybrid-warfare/>)

¹³ Civil.ge. (2018). Georgia's Foreign Trade in 2017. [online], Accessed on 01.03.2018, Available at - <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30809>

¹⁴ Georgian National Tourism Administration. (2018). Inbound Tourism. [online], Accessed on 26.02.2018, Available at: <http://stats.gnta.ge/Default.aspx>

¹⁵ The term "Near Abroad" is Russia's preferred designation for the fourteen Soviet Successor states other than itself.

¹⁶ Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2017) "[IMPIS1 - Most Important Issue Facing the Country - Caucasus Barometer]", Accessed on 03.03.2018, Available at - <http://caucasusbarometer.org>

¹⁷ The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2017) "Knowledge of and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia" [EUAMIGPS: EU Association Agreement will Improve Sale of Georgian Products on the EU Market], Accessed on 28.03.2018 Available at - <http://caucasusbarometer.org>

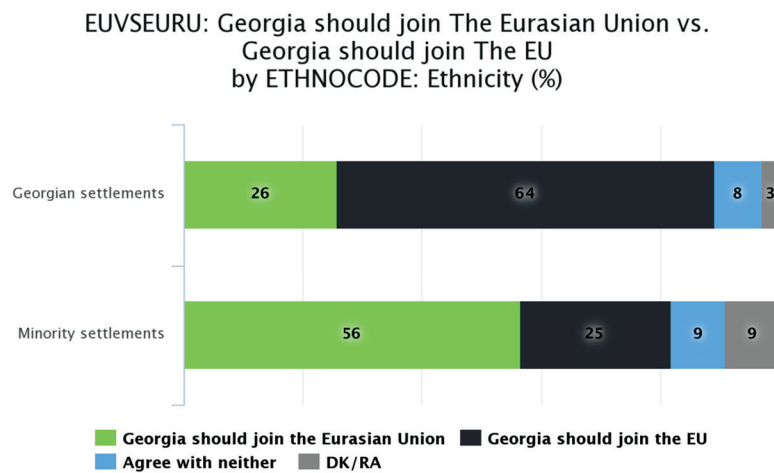
issues. That type of calculation has helped the success of the far-right Eurosceptic Lega Nord as well as anti-establishment Five Star movement in the recent parliamentary elections in Italy¹⁸.

Implications for Democratization. Georgian citizens' expectations on EU integration are social and economical in nature. While Russia portrays itself as a country that guarantees order, prosperity and stability for its citizens, Moscow undermines the potential attraction of the EU by trying to sabotage its promises to increase living standards, and plays up Europe's diversity and risk to Georgia's unique culture. The Kremlin's goal is to decrease public support for Georgia's pro-Western orientation, which could result in reducing voter trust in the government's ac-

tions and undermining the democratization process in Georgia.

Ethnic Minorities. Ethnic Russians comprise roughly 1% of the overall population in Georgia, which limits the Kremlin's ability to use them for legitimizing interference in other countries' domestic affairs. Georgia's ethnic minorities tend to be less supportive for a pro-Western stance in polls – a lever that Russia might exploit to breed division lines in the society. A few trends should be pointed out in the 2017 NDI polls on public attitudes in Georgia. First, a stark difference is noticeable in attitudes toward the EU and the Eurasian Union membership perspectives, with ethnic minorities comprising a 56% share of those who support the latter option for Georgia compared to 26% of ethnic Georgians¹⁹.

Figure 1. Public Attitudes in Georgia towards Joining the EU vs the Eurasian Union among Georgian and Ethnic Minority Settlements



¹⁸ Donadio, R. (2018). The Italian Implosion. [online] The Atlantic, Accessed on 10.03.2018, Available at - <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/03/italy-elections-five-star-league/554990/>

¹⁹ The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2017) "[EUVSEURU: Georgia should join the Eurasian Union vs. Georgia should join the EU by ETHNOCODE: Ethnicity (%)]", Accessed on 01.03.2018, Available at - <http://caucasusbarometer.org/>

Furthermore, Russian Channel I (ORT), a major tool for Russian propaganda²⁰, is the most trusted for accurate information among the ethnic minorities. In Georgia they have trouble integrating into the wider society, in part due to their lack of knowledge of Georgian language, and report lower levels of education and civic and political engagement²¹. Curious enough, among respondents representing ethnic minorities who agree that Russian propaganda does take place, 17% believe it is disseminated through networks of neighbors or friends (compared to only 2% of ethnic Georgian respondents)²².

Implications for Democratization. Differences between the attitude of ethnic minorities and ethnic Georgians towards the country's democratic and pro-Western path provides natural divisions that can be exploited by Russia. The democratization process cannot be successful without the engagement and successful integration of ethnic minorities. Currently it would not be a challenge for Russia to establish a parallel reality in the areas where there are compact settlements of ethnic minorities due to the network of organizations and media effectively functioning there.

Orthodox Church At the 2013 annual press conference Vladimir Putin stated "My attitude towards the Georgian people has not

changed – it was benevolent and it has remained so. Moreover, this kind of attitude was confirmed by the friendly attitude of Georgians towards Russia [...] *we enjoy the deepest cultural and spiritual relations*"²³. Religious institutions in Georgia are among the most trusted institutes in the country²⁴. In democracies and democratizing societies trust towards governing institutions is a core indicator of popular approval of government actions. Low trust towards governing institutions results in voters' low turnout at elections, increase in opposition sentiments and the rise of radical parties.

Georgians closely link their national identity with being Orthodox, according to Pew Research Center data²⁵. Georgia is second only to Greece in the percentage of respondents considering their "culture not perfect but superior to others" (with 85% and 89% of respondents accordingly)²⁶. Associating culture and religious belonging with cultural superiority, especially if the message comes from the Church, creates a fertile ground for Russia. Poland, Hungary and Slovakia are the EU countries that share certain characteristics with Georgia, and have shifted from being predominantly Euro-optimistic to increasingly Eurosceptic. Georgians, however, rank fairly low among Orthodox countries that believe a strong Russia is necessary to counter the West.

²⁰ The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2017) "[TRURCH1: TV Channels you trust the most for accurate information – Russia Channel One (1 КаналОРТ) by ETHNOCODE: Ethnicity (%)]", Accessed on 01.03.2018, Available at - <http://caucasusbarometer.org>.

²¹ Democracy & Freedom Watch Staff (2018). კვლევა უმცირესობების პრობლემები გამოავლინა. [online] Democracy & Freedom Watch. Accessed on 22.02.2018, Available at - <https://goo.gl/pDW8UJ>

²² Ibid.

²³ ГОЛОС АМЕРИКИ [Voice of America]. (2013). Владимир Путин: «У меня самое доброе отношение к грузинскому народу» [Vladimir Putin: "I experience the kindest attitude towards the Georgian nation"]. [online], Accessed on 24.02.2018, Available at - <https://www.golos-ameriki.ru/a/geor-russia/1814444.html>

²⁴ The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2017) "[TRURELI: Trust – Religious Institutions respondent belong to (%)]", Accessed on 01.03.2018, Available at - <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2017ge/TRURELI/>

²⁵ Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe (2017). Religion & Public Life. [online] Pew Research Center Accessed on 05.03.2018, Available at - <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>

²⁶ Ibid.

Implications for Democratization. The so-called spiritual links between Georgians and Russians form a core part of Kremlin's soft power strategy in Georgia. Russia envisages itself as on a mission to preserve the Orthodox religion in the world. The Georgian Or-

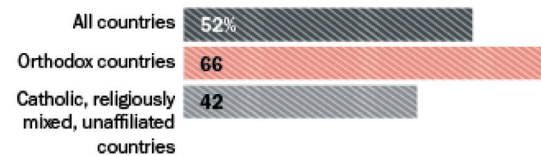
thodox Church is a conservative stronghold and is seen as contributing to Eurosceptic attitudes among the Georgian population, many of whom fear that Georgia's pro-EU path will ruin Georgia's unique identity.

Figure 2. Share of Respondents in Orthodox countries Completely or Mostly Agreeing that Russia is Necessary to Counter the West

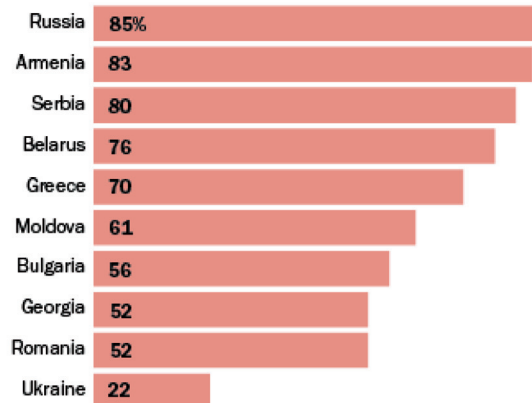
Majorities in Orthodox countries look to Russia to counter the West

% who completely or mostly agree with the statement, "A strong Russia is necessary to balance the influence of the West"

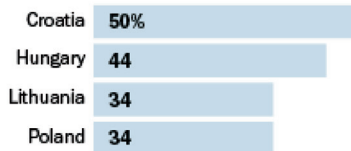
Median results of surveyed countries



Among those in Orthodox-majority countries



Among those in Catholic-majority countries



Among those in religiously mixed countries



Among those in majority religiously unaffiliated countries



Source: Survey conducted June 2015-July 2016 in 18 countries.

See Methodology for details.

"Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe"

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Russian organizational network. The Kremlin perceives the collapse of the Soviet Union as the greatest tragedy of the 20th century, which resulted in around 25 million Russians living outside the country's borders. According to Putin, *"If it is not the problem for you, for me it is the problem"*²⁷. Russia has developed a sophisticated network of its "soft power weapon" through the so-called GONGOs (Government-controlled NGOs) which are the "Russkiy Mir Foundation," dealing with promotion of Russian language and culture; "Rossotrudnichestvo" (The Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation), dealing with a wide range of objectives from the international development promotion to promoting Russian culture abroad; "The Foundation for Supporting and Protecting the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad;" the "Gorchakov Fund;" and The WARP Foundation for Cooperation with Russian-Language Media Abroad. Interestingly enough, these massive promoters of Russian interest abroad were established between 2007 and 2011.

The Gorchakov Fund has an official representation in Tbilisi, known as the Evgeniy Primakov Russian-Georgian Public Center, which discusses Russian-Georgian relations,

dialogue between the two countries in relation to the territorial conflicts, etc. Recently, the center organized a public lecture involving Georgia's former state officials²⁸. "The Foundation for Supporting and Protecting the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad" is represented in Georgia through its partner organization Center for Legal Assistance for Russian Compatriots²⁹. "Rossotrudnichestvo" has two official representations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Russian Centers for Science and Culture in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali respectively³⁰. The major actor of Russian soft power projection on the global scale is the initiative under the ambitious title of "Russian World" ("Russkiy Mir"), stressing the global outreach of Russia's culture.

"Russkiy Mir" does not have official representations on the territory controlled by the Government of Georgia. Yet, its centers are functioning in Georgia's neighboring countries. Particularly, in Turkey (Kars), Armenia (Yerevan) and Azerbaijan (Baku), resulting in a "Russian World" belt around Georgia. While support for compatriots is an official explanation for numerous centers functioning on the territory of Georgia, such organizations are established in the areas of the compact settlement of ethnic minorities, for instance Armenians and Azerbaijanis³¹.

²⁷ CBSN (2015). Charlie Rose Interviews Vladimir Putin. [video], Accessed on 01.03.2018, Available at - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8k2pWbCjrw>

²⁸ Georgian Russian Public Center (Feb. 2018) В Общественном Центре Состоялась Лекция в Связи с Грузино-Абхазским Конфликтом [Lecture on the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict took place at the Premises of the Georgian-Russian Public Center], Accessed on 28.03.2018, Available at - <https://www.facebook.com/pg/rusgeocenter/notes/>

²⁹ The Coordination Council for Russian Compatriots Communities in Georgia - <http://korsovet.ge/>, Accessed on 25.03.2018.

³⁰ ROSSOTRUDNICHESTVO - Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation, Accessed on 25.03.2018, Available at - <http://rs.gov.ru/en/contacts>

³¹ Список Организаций [List of Organizations] (2018) Russkiy Mir Foundation [online], Accessed on 03.03.2018, Available at - https://ruskiymir.ru/catalogue/catalog.php?country=76&category=&set_filter=%CF%EE%EA%E0%E7%E0%F2%FC,

Reaching out to non-Russian ethnic minorities raise questions about the real goals of the centers.

Implications for Democratization. Ethnic minorities are entitled to organizations representing and protecting their interests, especially if a particular ethnic group is not strongly integrated with the host community. However, the work of these organizations lacks transparency including reports on their funding, mission, scope and character of activities. A review of the web pages of the organizations shows that many do not provide any information whatsoever or only publish unclear and incomplete information, which raises questions about their goals. The network of Russia's GONGOs in Georgia is limited compared to the other FSU countries. Nevertheless, its long-term consequences for Georgian society might negatively influence the existing wide public support for democratic consolidation.

Russia's network of organizations in Georgia follows the pattern established in Eastern Ukraine after the Orange Revolution of 2004. Although the centers were part of Russia's soft power in Ukraine, for ten years they managed to capitalize on the dissatisfaction of the part of population over Ukraine's pro-Western shift, increasing corruption and "language problem," laying the grounds for the separatist project observed today.

Support for Eurosceptic and anti-Western Political Parties. Russia's longest existing instrument to interfere in democratization process is its support for political parties with an openly pro-Russian, anti-Western or Eurosceptic standpoints. Since the demise of the USSR states which hosted significant Russian ethnic minorities have been particularly vulnerable, as the Russian minority community has become an important electorate for pro-Russian/anti-Western political parties, as was the case in Ukraine or Moldova³². Pro-Russian parties are regarded as a regular phenomenon for the Baltic countries as well³³. Unlike Moldova and Ukraine, Georgia has traditionally not had openly pro-Russian political parties in its legislature. However, Georgia tends to fit into another strategy Russia is using to meddle with democracies, especially in the West, i.e. its support for Eurosceptic political parties in Europe. Officially, the parties are promoting "inter-party and inter-parliamentary dialogue" between the EU and Russia with the view to overcoming the lack of trust between both. Cooperation agreements already exist between Austrian Far-Right Freedom Party and the "Lega Nord" party of Italy. In 2014, it was discovered that the anti-immigrant far-right National Front of France was receiving Russian funding³⁴. As party representatives state, partnership with Russia is viable for its fighting international terrorism and preserving traditional values³⁵.

³² Stratfor Worldview (2014) The Former Soviet Union Two Decades On. Assessments. [online], Accessed on 20.03.2018, Available at - <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/former-soviet-union-two-decades>

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Graff, G., Newman, L., Lapowsky, I., Greenberg, A. and Greenberg, A. (2018). Russia's High Tech Tool Box for Subverting US Democracy, A (Semi-Complete) Guide. [online] WIRED, Accessed on 03.03.2018, Available at - <https://www.wired.com/story/a-guide-to-russias-high-tech-tool-box-for-subverting-us-democracy/>

³⁵ Themoscwotimes.com. (2016). Putin's United Russia Signs Cooperation Agreement With Far-Right Austrian Party. [online], Accessed on 12.02.2018, Available at: <https://themoscwotimes.com/news/putins-united-russia-signs-cooperation-agreement-with-far-right-austrian-party-56579>; RT International. (2018). United Russia party signs cooperation agreement with Italy's Lega Nord. [online], Accessed on 03.03.2018, Available at - <https://www.rt.com/politics/379737-united-russia-party-signs-cooperation/>

The Georgian party the Alliance of Patriots, founded in 2012, is following in the footsteps of its European colleagues and holding meetings with Russian parliamentarians³⁶. Other political parties, such as United Democratic Movement/Free Georgia, which has become a marginal political force, are also frequent guests in Moscow and portray integration with the West as unrealistic while advocating for a pragmatic approach to build closer relations with Russia³⁷.

Implications for Democratization. While the exact effect of influence of Russian and pro-Russian organizations as part of civil society is difficult to assess, the presence of the Eurosceptic or pro-Russian political parties in the parliament poses a threat to democratization in Georgia. Georgia's 2016 parliamen-

tary elections was the first time an openly Eurosceptic and pro-Russian party entered the parliament, which could help erode consensus on Georgia's European Choice as the guarantee for successful democratization. A similar pattern is taking place in the countries of the Western Europe.

The "grand strategy" used by Russia in the West should not be underestimated, as without the EU and US strong support, Georgia's democratization prospective could be at risk. The West, which is currently preoccupied with the domestic problems, might find fewer incentives to offer democratizing countries any membership perspectives. This would lead to popular disappointment and decrease support for political parties seeing consolidated democracy as the goal.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Russia's has been waging its "grand strategy" to undermine the foundations of the liberal-democratic global order. While the Kremlin's success in the former Soviet Union has been marred by the democratic progress of the Baltic countries, Moscow is intent on disrupting the democratization of its Near Abroad, especially in Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. The Kremlin's strategy is manifold: first, it seeks to discredit democracy promotion in the eyes of democratizing societies by revealing the vulnerability of consolidated democracies. It then tries to demonstrate the governments' inability and/or unwillingness to push for

democratic reforms and earn popular trust. The strategies Russia has utilized in both the West and Georgia are the same: find potential divisive issues and fan disagreements in society about them through the use of propaganda, proxies in the political spectrum as well as civil society. The threat of domestic security threats is widely used if Russia is criticized.

In response, the Georgian government together with its international partners should pursue a well-balanced and cautious strategy to avoid discrediting the achievements of democratization while still maintaining

³⁶ Duma.gov.ru. (2017). Л.Калашников встретился с грузинскими парламентариями [L. Kalashnikov met Georgian MPs] [online], Accessed on -07.03.2018, Available at - http://www.duma.gov.ru/news/273/2097727/?sphrase_id=2880112

³⁷ რუსეთის ხისტი და რბილი ძალის საფრთხეები საქართველოში [Russia's Hard and Soft Power Threats in Georgia]. (2016). [online] Tbilisi: European Initiative - Liberal Academy Tbilisi, 126 pages, Accessed on 06.03.2018., Available at - <http://www.ei-lat.ge/rusethis-gavlena-saqarthveloze/608-rusethis-khisti-da-rbili-dzalis-saftrthkheebi-saqarthveloshi.html?lang=ka-GE>

pragmatic relations with Russia.

The paper's policy recommendations are divided into those that concern Russia and organizations representing its interests di-

rectly, as well as those that envisage implications for domestic issues, and proactive measures to diminish the power of Russian propaganda.

For the Georgian government:

- The Georgian government should understand the increasing authoritarian nature of the Russian government and closely observe the messages coming from Russia's incoming presidential administration. With the 2018 presidential elections behind him, Vladimir Putin will present his vision of Russia for the next six years. The Georgian government should look for signals based on which it can elaborate its own strategy for bilateral relations.
 - An exchange of practices on preventing, counteracting and exposing Russia's interference with democratic processes in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia would create opportunities for the three democratizing states to stand as a unified front; in the light of the recent chill in relations between Ukraine and Georgia, a forum for regular consultations between the three countries on different levels would reestablish trust and improve cooperation; for Georgia this forum would be of special significance because of its predominantly authoritarian neighborhood;
 - The Centers of Legal Assistance to Russian Compatriots in Georgia should not be underestimated. The Office of the Ombudsman in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice should ensure that ethnic minorities get first-hand legal assistance and avoid intermediaries.
- Monitoring instruments should be set in place to ensure that legal consultations are in compliance with Georgian legislation;
 - Further exchange of innovative cyber security practices and strengthening security of electoral data (with trainings for the members of the Election Administration of Georgia) should be a priority in order to avoid Russian-orchestrated attacks and attempts to discredit the trustworthiness of election outcomes;
 - The government should continue to enhance the dissemination and accessibility of information on the benefits of the EU Association Agreement. The information campaign on AA/DCFTA VLAP Implementation among the Georgian population launched in January 2017 is already a positive development. As most Georgians receive information from TV, it should be used as a platform for exposing Russian propaganda;
 - The government in cooperation with civil society organizations and international donors should support the training of media representatives on exposing false information and fact checking false information spread by Russian propaganda;

For international organizations:

- International actors investing in democracy promotion should realize that without their permanent support, Georgia will not be able to cope with the complexity of the challenges it faces from Russia. Therefore, continuous support would encourage the government to further push for democratic reforms in spite of external challenges;
- International donors should continue to fund research and reports monitoring Russia's malign influence and tools to undermine the credibility of democratic governance; special focus should be paid to elaborating possible scenarios for Russia's influence as well as relatively less researched issues such as cyberattacks on elections;
- Georgia would also benefit from establishing the Center for Countering Hybrid Threats, like the one established in Finland, where all possible strategies employed by the Kremlin would be researched under one roof. However, without extensive funding, it would be impossible. The center might become a hub for sharing similar experience with other countries in the region;
- The EU should continue to use conditionality over Georgia's democratic performance, where setbacks would be subject to pressure to consistently align with the reforms process; in this manner, Russia's malign influence would be counterbalanced by the EU's willingness to act;
- As the Georgian Orthodox Church still plays a significant role in shaping popular opinion, international actors should increase projects promoting dialogue between representatives of the Georgian clergy and those of the Orthodox Churches of other democratizing countries, including Romania, Serbia, Greece, Ukraine, and Moldova. The outcomes of such discussions should be publicly disseminated. Exchanges with the clergy of countries that are already members of the EU or are candidates for accession would help to undermine one of Russia's fundamental tools for negative influence over popular opinion and the democratization process.

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